SUBJECTIVE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AMONG

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS:

A Generational Study

A Professional Project

Presented to

the Faculty of the

School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

Linda Smith Stowell

May 1995

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This professional project, completed by

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has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty

of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

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ABSTRACT

Subjective Religious Experience Among Unitarian Universalists:

A Generational Study

by Linda Smith Stowell

The purpose of this study was to look at changing patterns of religious perspective and experience among Unitarian Universalists in the United States, in terms of generation and gender, and to provide context for better understanding these changes. A questionnaire was used as the primary research tool. The core of the questionnaire was an inquiry regarding six specific experiences divided into two clusters: sense of oneness/ harmony, sudden strong feelings of light/joy, and sense of intuitive certainty; and sense of 'felt' presence, voice, and vision. Informants were asked about frequency of experiences, impacts upon beliefs and decision-making, feeling responses and understandings.

The thesis of this project is that differences in frequency and type of subjective experiences found among contemporary Unitarian Universalists, as well as frames for interpreting and valuing such experiences, correlate with generation, in particular with generation interacting with gender. The hypothesis that generation, interacting with gender, is correlated with the changes in religious experience and conviction within the Unitarian Universalist community was strongly supported by this study.

Chapter 1 provides the groundwork for the research project, including a brief discussion of previous research. Chapter 2 is a summary of general research findings, demonstrating patterns of relationship between experiences, epistemology, religious practices and beliefs. Chapter 3 demonstrates how patterns of variance are correlated with age and gender, both for clergy and laity. Chapter 4 provides three contexts within which to understand the findings: (1) a sociological model of generational differences within U.S. culture; (2) a brief overview of changing attitudes towards the more subjective side of religious experience within the history of Unitarian

Universalism; and (3) changing patterns of denominational identity as reflected in recent documents and trends. Chapter 5 provides some general suggestions for applying the findings of this study to pastoral ministry in the areas of spiritual counseling, religious education and identity formation. Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of this study, and offers suggestions for further research.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

<u>Statement of the Problem</u>

At this point in history, the Unitarian Universalist tradition is struggling with its self-definition. The dominant philosophical emphases are shifting from rational humanism to naturalistic theism, mystical humanism, feminist theology and process theology. Does this shift reflect trends in our general culture? Does it reflect and/or influence the subjective religious experience of members of the Unitarian Universalist community?

This project employs historical and sociological methods to look at how Unitarian Universalists experience, name and understand the subjective dimension of religious experience. Contemporary differences in experiences, perception and understanding with emphasis upon age and gender variations are explored. These trends are then considered within the context of Unitarian Universalist history and American cultural patterns.

<u>Importance of the Problem</u>

The debate among Unitarian Universalists about the validity and importance of subjective religious experience is based primarily upon personal opinion interacting with theological, psychological, and even political theory (as in the question of whether valuing the subjective dimension of religious experience will undermine the will to social activism). This study provides information from both primary and secondary research which will offer Unitarian Universalists a broader understanding of both their own experience and that of others.

The primary empirical research in this project provides reality-testing which can help to move the debate away from personal, prescriptive judgments towards a more realistic acceptance of the diversity of points of view within contemporary Unitarian Universalist communities. It is hoped

that the data provided by this study will foster deeper mutual understanding between people whose experience differs, particularly between different age groups and between men and women. Such an understanding, grounded in experience rather than theory alone, can provide a solid foundation for mutually respectful dialogue. It can contribute to the formation of a more inclusive paradigm for understanding the subjective dimension of spiritual experience. The data explored in this paper is important to the process of clarifying our identity and meeting the spiritual needs of contemporary people -- vital tasks as our tradition prepares to enter the twenty-first century.

Thesis

The central thesis of this project is that differences in frequency and type of subjective experiences, as well as frames for interpreting and valuing such experiences, correlate with generation. After a pilot study done as a class project, the thesis was refined to focus upon the influence of generation interacting with gender. Findings supported the initial hypotheses in relation to the distribution patterns of these differences according to generation. Both the frequency of occurrence and the value given to such phenomena tend to be lowest for the elder generation. Among the two mid-life generations, frequency and valuing both tend to be higher on most items than for elders. Among the youth/young adult generation, however, higher frequency correlates less with valuing. These age groups, as a whole, have little conceptual framework within which to value or understand their experiences, even though the frequency of these experiences tends to be higher than for elders. The generational pattern is significantly stronger for women than for men.

Scope and Limitations

This D.Min. project is built upon an original research project using questionnaire and interview techniques (primarily the former). The study explores a set of subjective experiences that are often labeled "spiritual" or "mystical." In addition to inquiring about the frequency and

type of phenomena, the questions also draw out subjects' understandings regarding their

experiences. Questions of how these experiences are valued and how they influence behavior are

also addressed. The project provides information about how a population of Unitarian

Universalists respond, understand and value subjective experiences of certain types. It also

provides some background concerning religious practices, beliefs, and factors which have

influenced each subject's convictions, in order to have a context in which to evaluate the

phenomena being studied. Some suggestions towards larger contexts in which to understand the

generational shifts in Unitarian Universalist experience are offered as well, including generational

patterns within U.S. culture and prior theological shifts within the history of the tradition. Finally,

some general suggestions for how the findings of this study can inform pastoral counseling and

religious education are offered, along with ideas for further study.

Sample population included approximately two-thirds laity, primarily from two churches in

Southern California, and one-third clergy from diverse locations within the U.S. and Canada. The

assumption is that clergy are influential in shaping the spiritual directions of their congregations,

and that trends among the clergy are important for understanding trends in the tradition as a whole.

However, this study is limited by the narrow geographic representation in the lay sample. It is also

limited by lack of clergy informants under the age of thirty-five. Further study would need to

compare sample populations from other geographic regions, since the denomination is known to

vary somewhat by region. It would also be helpful to look at how clergy patterns continue into the

young adult generation. Both clergy and lay samples would need to be larger for more definitive

results.

Extrapolation from samples is also limited by lack of a randomized selection process. The

researcher requested participation of both lay and clergy with whom she had direct contact during

the research period. Roughly two-thirds of the clergy who agreed at a national minister's meeting

to participate actually returned the questionnaire. The return rate from laity was closer to 80 percent. One-half of researcher's own parishioners participated on a volunteer basis. An effort was made to expand the initial lay sample to better represent generation and gender. Further research would need to include a more random approach to sample selection.

On the questionnaire, several questions correlate with findings of the Commission on Appraisal studies by the Unitarian Universalist Association. Such correlations allow tentative conclusions concerning how typical the study sample is of the larger Unitarian Universalist population. This gives an indicator of the degree to which findings from this small study might be generalized. Otherwise, the scope of findings is limited to cross-correlations of items within the small sample population, and can only be suggestive in nature beyond that point.

Computer-generated correlations suggest associative connections between independent and dependent variables. These patterns of correlation provide directions for further research. They also suggest directions for modifying the questionnaire into a more effective form as an instrument for further research.

Definitions of Terms

Subjective Religious Experience

For the purposes of this study, *subjective religious experience* refers to interior experience which is unique to the individual and has transpersonal overtones, i.e. involve a softening of boundaries of the "ordinary" sense of self. These experiences are sometimes described as enhancing a sense of greater unity, integration or wholeness within an individual, or they may be understood as a connecting with or experiencing unity with a perceived larger reality or source of knowledge. All forms of experience self-defined as religious have a subjective dimension. However, the focus in this study is primarily upon the limited set of experiences specifically named in the questionnaire. These include: a sense of oneness/unity; sudden strong feelings of light/joy; a

sense of intuitive certainty, a sense of "felt" presence, and the experience of a voice or vision. These experiences are all commonly named by the researchers' parishioners as examples of "religious experience." Within the Unitarian Universalist tradition, experiences of these types have received less acknowledgment and recognition as vehicles of religious life than have rationality and service. While none of the subjects in the present study questioned the classification of these experiences as "subjective religious experience," several pointed out that such experiences, for them, constituted a minor part of their religious life. The purpose of this study is not to claim that these experiences are definitive of "subjective religious experience." Rather, the purpose is to provide experiential evidence of the frequency and importance of a class of experience often discounted in the past as relevant to the Unitarian Universalist tradition, and how these phenomena correlate with age.

Mystical Experience

For the purposes of this study, this term will generally be used in accord with William James' classical definition. According to him, a "mystical experience" has the qualities of ineffability (it cannot be adequately described), a noetic or "knowledge" component, transiency, and passivity (the experiencer did not actively bring it about).[1]

It was found that most of the subjects who frequently had experiences of a sense of "felt" presence described their experience as "mystical." In most cases, at least three of James' four qualities were present, the "noetic" quality being least common. The self-ascriptions given for the first set of experiences (a sense of oneness/harmony, sudden strong feelings of light/joy, and a sense of intuitive certainty) varied. However, those who have had "presence" experiences tended to apply the term "mystical" to the commoner types of experience as well.

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[1] William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Penguin, 1982), 380-81.

Nature Mysticism

This is a term in common use among Unitarian Universalists and others to indicate an ineffable experience of unity with nature, usually characterized by joyfulness and peace. Such experience tends to be transient and passive, but rarely includes a "noetic" component.

Mystical Awareness

As this study proceeded, it became apparent that for a number of the subjects another description was needed. Their experiences were "ineffable," passive (experienced as "given" rather than actively created), and often had a component of intuitive knowledge, but they were not as transient as William James' model would expect. Several subjects spoke of living much of the time in an on-going state of "mystical awareness" (self-ascribed), rather than experiencing such awareness only for transient moments.

Outline of Method

Sample

The questionnaire study includes a sample of 157 subjects. Ninety-nine lay subjects, (primarily from two Unitarian Universalist churches) are representative of five generations: youth (15-20), young adult (21-35), young mid-lifers (36-50), older mid-lifers (51-65), and elders (65 and above). In addition, a sample of 58 Unitarian Universalist clergy allows a comparison between lay and clergy viewpoints. The sample was fairly well balanced between men and women.

Questionnaire and Interviews

The original research design included both questionnaire and interview techniques. In execution, primary focus was upon the questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed as part of a class entitled "Cultural Psychology of Religion."[2] It is based upon definitions and concepts of religious experience discussed in that context. One-third of the subjects were part of a pilot project

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[2] The course was taught by Ann Taves, Professor of History of Christianity and American Religion, School of Theology at Claremont, fall 1992.

for that class using a first draft of the questionnaire. After the pilot was completed, the questionnaire was shortened by dropping questions which seemed redundant or did not elicit information helpful to the study.

In order to provide cross-correlation with a larger sample, some questions were taken from the Unitarian Universalist Association Commission on Appraisal studies of trends within Unitarian Universalism.[3] Questions were included from these studies on prayer and meditation, the nature of God, afterlife, and the issue of purposeful existence.

Primary population variables for the questionnaire study are generation, gender, and lay/clergy identity. Also included are childhood faith, length of time in the Unitarian Universalist tradition, and frequency of church attendance. Background is provided with questions about frequency of prayer/meditation; factors which influence religious convictions; and ideas about God, prayer/meditation, afterlife, and purpose within existence. Process variables specific to this study include frequency and type of subjective experience (within the categories named), emotional responses to such experiences, how they are understood and valued, and their impact on beliefs and decision-making.

The questions about subjective experience are divided into two clusters. The first cluster, experienced almost universally, includes: a sense of oneness/harmony, sudden strong feelings of light/joy, and a sense of intuitive certainty. The second cluster includes the less frequent experiences of a voice, vision, and a sense of "felt" presence. For each cluster, questions are asked concerning the above process variables.

A psychologist, experienced with statistical analysis, has run a summary of responses and specified cross-correlations between variables on his computer program (generating over 300 pages

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[3] Robert Tapp, Religion among the Unitarian Universalists: Converts in the Stepfather's House (New York: Seminar Press, 1973); and Unitarian Universalist Assoc., The Quality of Religious Life in Unitarian Universalist Congregations (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Assoc., 1989).

of figures). Access to this resource has made it possible to test correlations between variables, to test for statistical significance of both variance and correlations, and to generate means from which to make graphs showing gender and generation patterns. The results of such correlations can also be used to refine the questionnaire instrument for future use. A few additional correlations, whose relevance became apparent later, were checked manually.

Interviews were carried out with more than a dozen subjects, representing different groups. The primary purpose of the interviews was to collect more detailed information on the nature and interpretation of experiences, and to observe the interpretation process at work. Such information may provide deeper understanding of personal life factors contributing to frequency, type and understanding of experiences. Due to time and space constraints, little use is made of interview material in this paper. However, further research will make more use of such materials.

Historical, Sociological and Anthropological Framework.

In addition to primary data from questionnaire and interview material, this study incorporates secondary research material from the fields of history and sociology. Both are used primarily in Chapter 4, which provides contextual material to help in the interpretation of the primary data.

Historical materials are primarily from histories of Unitarianism and Universalism, and biographies of significant representatives of these faiths. Original words (primary material) are used where available. This material is included to demonstrate that the variety of patterns of religious experience described by informants in the present are not new to our tradition, but have occurred in the past.

This study is sociological in its primary research methods. The primary research findings are examined in the context of the society in which they occur, using the framework provided a generational model created by William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book Generations.[4] This

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[4] William Strauss and Neil Howe, Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069 (New York: William Morrow, 1991).

sociological approach also includes the examination of written statements (denominational Statement of Principles and Purposes and hymnbook) for evidence of changing belief assumptions and values.

<div align="center">Work Previously Done in the Field</div>

Denominational Studies

Within the Unitarian Universalist tradition in the United States, research and writing have been focused upon social and political dimensions of religious life more than upon personal or subjective dimensions. The growing grassroots spirituality within the movement has been influenced by process theology, feminist theology, and creation-centered spirituality more than by publications within the denomination, or sociological studies of religious life.

What is available from recent decades are the results of questionnaire studies about Unitarian Universalist identity. While questions are not asked which directly target the focus of this project, some of them can be related. The most extensive of these studies was published in 1973 by Robert Tapp, Research Director for the UUA effort in the late 1960s. His book, entitled Religion Among the Unitarian Universalists: Converts in the Stepfather's House, allows us a glimpse of the self-definition of the Unitarian Universalists of that generation. A number of questions are repeated in studies during the 1970s and 1980s, allowing a comparison.[5]

Out of this research, questions in four areas were included in this project: beliefs about God, practice and understanding of prayer/meditation, what has been most influential upon the formation of beliefs, and (although less directly relevant) beliefs concerning afterlife and purpose in existence.

A question on theism used in the three studies (and included for comparison in the questionnaire for the current study) offers the following options:[6]

1. "God" is a supernatural being revealed in human experience and history.
2. "God" is the ground of all being, real but not adequately describable.

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[5] See especially, UUA, Quality of Religious Life.
[6] Ibid., 34.

3. "God" may appropriately be used as a name for some natural process within the universe, such as love or creative evolution.
4. "God" is an irrelevant concept, and the central focus of religion should be on human knowledge and values.
5. "God" is a concept that is harmful to a worthwhile religion.

In the 1989 study results for the three decades are compared on this question. The total of the first three positions had increased significantly, by 11 percent. Adherence to statement #4, that the concept "God" was irrelevant, had decreased by a similar amount. The most recent study shows #1 at 4 percent, #2 at 28 percent, #3 at 49 percent, #4 at 18 percent, and #5 at 2 percent.

A new question about god-concepts was added in 1989. This question, worded: "The way I would describe the divine for myself --,"gave an additional range of options. Respondents put "creative force" at 29 percent, and "highest potential" at 18 percent as the two most popular choices. "Harmony with nature," "unknowable power", and "uncertain" all polled 11 percent, while "superior being" and "meaningless" tied with 3 percent each.[7] These results show the status of a continuing evolution of ideas. The influence of naturalistic process theology, such as that proposed by Henry Nelson Wieman, appears especially strong, even though most Unitarian Universalists in the parish are not aware of his work. These ideas appear to have spread more through worship materials than formal study of theology.

This leads to my primary observation about changes in worship preferences during the past two decades, as illustrated by these studies. "Intellectual Stimulation" remained the top stated goal for worship, with 74 percent of the informants considering it "very important." But percentages for "celebrating common values" (60 percent very important) and "Group Experience of Participation and Worship" (44 percent very important) had doubled. Even more dramatically, the number stating that celebrating common values was "not important" dropped from 21 percent to 5 percent.[8]

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[7] Ibid., 34.
[8] Ibid., 19.

The questions concerning practice and attitudes towards prayer cannot be compared directly, since in 1987 the wording was not simply "prayer" but "prayer or meditation," and it asked about the purpose and function that these "might fulfill," as opposed to "fulfills for you." However, it seems significant that, in 1967, 36 percent of the respondents said they never prayed, while that percentage in 1987 had dropped to 13 percent. Also, more diverse functions were affirmed, including several traditional ones (although evidence suggests differing interpretations). In 1967, only 12 percent identified "Communion with God" as a function that prayer served for them. In 1987, 39 percent agreed that this was a function that prayer/meditation could serve. Even such a humanistic purpose as "communion with inner self" jumped from 31 percent to 88 percent. The traditional categories of "petition for self" and "intercession for others" as purposes for prayer jumped from 7 percent and 9 percent to 30 percent. At the same time, the percentage who did not "find the term useful" remained steady at 34 percent/32 percent, presumably because this remained a self-ascription.[9]

Finally, a question concerning life after death was asked on each questionnaire. In 1967, it was worded, "Is immortality, in the sense of a continued personal existence of the individual after death, part of your belief system?" At that time, 89 percent said "no," and only 10 percent said "yes." In 1987, the question was simply, "I believe in life after death," allowing the option of a "not sure" response. In this study, 15 percent said "yes," 38 percent said "not sure," and only 46 percent said "no."[10]

These belief trends within Unitarian Universalism indicate a more open climate for accepting classical religious ideas such as prayer, God, and mysticism, although with some new understandings. They also suggest a denominational movement in faith development. In terms of James Fowler's theory of stages of faith development, perhaps one way to understand the changes

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[9] Ibid., 36.
[10] Ibid., 36.

is a progression on the part of many Unitarian Universalists from stage four (rejection of the group's norms/individuation) to stage five (reintegration of traditional symbols on a less literal, more universal level).[11] These changes also come about in a larger cultural context in which there is more openness to redefining traditional terms.

Generational Patterns

For the purposes of this study, the framework in which generational differences are explored is that presented by Strauss and Howe in their recent book, Generations. Strauss and Howe made a study of generational patterns within American culture since the first settlement of the colonies. For their purposes, they named thirteen generations, within which they discerned a cyclical pattern of four generations with only one anomaly.[12] These authors note considerable common ground between their perceived pattern and the observations of other scholars in history and sociology.

This study will not attempt to demonstrate a cycle pattern of generations within Unitarian Universalism, although this might be an interesting subject for future study. It will, however, use Strauss and Howe's description of contemporary generations, as their divisions are within two or three years of the age-categories used in the study questionnaire. A description of generational characteristics observed by Strauss and Howe will appear in Chapter 4.

The interpretive approach of this study is to consider the questionnaire and interview data in light of these culture-wide characteristics. The hypothesis is that, while religious communities reflect the patterns of the culture of which they are a part, participating in a religious community may well help to bring out the strengths and modify the "blind spots" of generational cohort patterns.

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[11] James Fowler, "Stages of Faith and Adults' Life Cycles," in Faith Development in the Adult Life Cycle, ed. Kenneth Stokes, (New York: Sadlier, 1982), 189-92.
[12] Strauss and Howe, 35.

CHAPTER 2

Summary of General Research Findings

<u>Demographics</u>

The population which participated in this study were Unitarian Universalist laity and clergy. Within the total sample population, gender was balanced: 52 percent women and 48 percent men. There was, however, a small gender difference between lay and clergy samples. Among the laity, 56 percent were female and 44 percent were male; the clergy sample was the reverse at 45 percent and 55 percent respectively.

The questionnaire had six categories for age. However, due to the small number of informants between 21 and 25 years of age, this group was subsumed into the next age group (26-35). The age-categories were also gender-balanced, except for the 15-20 year-old group, which was two-thirds female. There were only five male youth, all friends of the researcher's daughter and probably not typical in terms of certain convictions and experiences. For the clergy sample, there is only one representative under the age of 36, and only two women over sixty-five, so a complete age-group comparison between lay and clergy samples was not possible. However, the two mid-life generations and the elder male groups could be compared, and were on several significant questions.

The most common childhood church affiliation was mainline Protestant (32 percent), followed by Unitarian Universalist (28 percent), conservative Protestant (16 percent), Catholic (11 percent), and Jewish (5 percent). Ten subjects (6.5 percent) answered "None." These affiliations were rather evenly split between men and women, except that several more women had been main-line Protestant, while several more men grew up Catholic or Jewish. Of those who were raised Unitarian Universalist, 42 percent were among the clergy, as compared to 34.6 percent of those

raised in other faiths. This is, of course, not typical of the population at large, but the clergy were included because of their presumed leadership role in shaping the denomination's new directions. While it was too cumbersome to separate lay and clergy populations for all questions, several significant ones were analyzed for lay-clergy differences.

Long-time Unitarian Universalists were well-represented in the sample as a whole, but there is also good representation across the membership duration categories. The mean length of time informants identified themselves as having been Unitarian Universalists was 23 years. Twenty percent had been members five years or less, 23 percent between 6 and 15 years, 26 percent between 16 and 30 years, 19 percent from 31 to 45 years, and 12 percent had been Unitarian Universalists for more than forty-five years.

<div align="center">Religious Practice</div>

Church Attendance

The subjects are, for the most part, frequent church attendees, and two-thirds of them also attended frequently as children. In this, they are not a representative sample of all Unitarian Universalists, as frequent attendees were more likely to be in contact with the researcher and therefore invited to participate. Since one-third are clergy, this also distorts this measure. Seventy-three percent of the total sample attend church at least three times a month (about 60 percent of the laypeople), 15 percent attend once or twice each month (about 25 percent of the laypeople), and 10 percent (15 percent of the laity) attend occasionally. One young adult never attends at this point in his life. Childhood attendance was 65 percent regularly, 12 percent once or twice a month, 21 percent occasionally, and 3 percent (5 people) never.

Prayer and Meditation

Frequency of prayer or meditation. The total sample reported their frequency of prayer/meditation as follows: 30 percent "often," 39 percent "occasionally," 24 percent "seldom,"

and 7 percent (10 people) "never." For the total population, the mean score on a scale of 1 (never) to 4 (frequently) was 2.97. Clergy rated themselves significantly higher than laypeople (especially among those raised Unitarian Universalist), while women had a small edge on men (not to the level of statistical significance). Graph 2.1 compares mean scores of the total sample with women and men, lay and clergy, and those raised Unitarian Universalist.

GRAPH 2.1: FREQUENCY OF PRAYER/ MEDITATION
Comparing different sample populations

RARELY			OCCASIONALLY					FREQUENT>			
2.0			2.5			3.0		3.5			4
TOTAL SAMPLE											
TOTAL WOMEN											
TOTAL Laypersons											
Raised Unitarian Univ.											
CLERGY Raised Unit. Univ.											
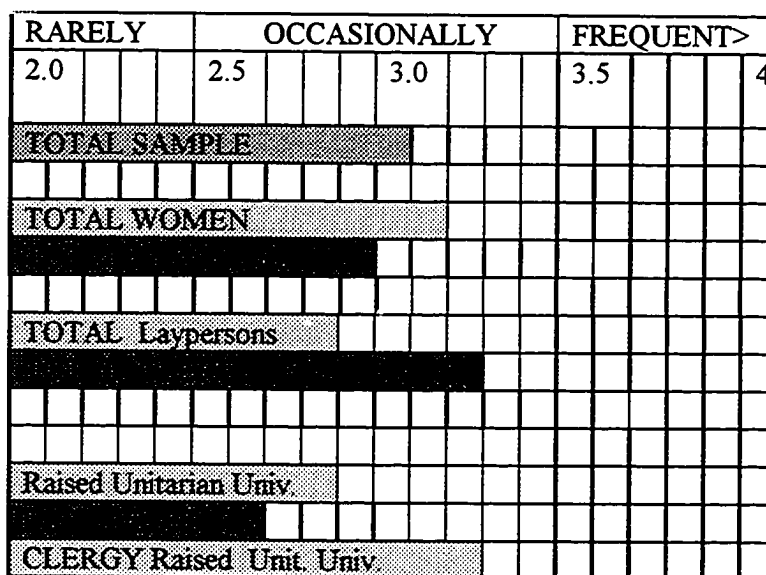
Purposes of prayer or meditation. Table 1 ranks in descending order of agreement the purposes prayer/meditation were seen as serving for the sample as a whole. There was considerable agreement across groups about the validity of the four purposes ranking highest, all of which have to do with the inner life of the subject. Only 3 percent of the sample population disagreed with the first three, and 10 percent with the fourth ("self-affirmation"). On the other end of the spectrum, only 16 people (about 11 percent) did not consider prayer or meditation useful terms for themselves, compared with 34 percent and 32 percent in the national surveys of 1967 and 1987.[1]

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[1]   UUA, Quality of Religious Life, 35.

This is certainly a sizable difference. The question must be asked as to whether this difference reflects an increasing shift over time, or whether the sample for this study is more inclined to a positive attitude towards prayer and/or meditation than Unitarian Universalists at large. Given the size of the difference, and the stability on this question reflected in the 1967 and 1987 study figures, doubt is raised about whether the current study population is normative. This question, along with others from the UUA studies, was included partly to give an indication of the generalizability of this study's findings.

TABLE 2.1: PURPOSES OF PRAYER/MEDITATION

Tend to agree: "4" = "agree" and "5" "strongly agree"	
1) Communion with inner self	4.45
2) To increase serenity	4.32
3) To clarify direction	4.26
4) Self-affirmation	3.91
5) Communion with God	3.28
Tend to disagree: "2"= "disagree" "1" "strongly"	
6) Intercession for others	2.87
7) Petition for self	2.86
8) Not a useful term	1.96

For the sample as a whole, the weakest positive response concerning purpose of prayer was "communion with God," with which 26 percent disagreed. 40 percent did agree with this purpose, however -- comparable to 39 percent in the 1987 UUA study, and in contrast with 12 percent in the 1967 UUA study.[2] The figures for this and the other purposes for prayer/meditation, unlike the previous question, do suggest that this study's sample is normative. It appears that this study's sample population conforms to national "norms" on some questions, but not on others.

Responses to this item (prayer or meditation as "communion with God") proved one of the most variable among the sub-populations. Women agree more than men, and, on the whole, the

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[2] Ibid., 35.

clergy more than the laity. However, among those of the clergy raised Unitarian Universalist, the gender difference is most extreme. All the Unitarian Universalist-raised female clergy agreed with this purpose for prayer, and only three out of ten male clergy did. It would be very interesting to test this finding with a larger sample, as the implications, if valid, are intriguing. Could being raised Unitarian Universalist have differing effects by gender (see Graph 2.2)?

GRAPH 2.2: PRAYER/MEDITATION AS COMMUNION WITH GOD

DISAGREE		DON'T KNOW		AGREE		STRONGLY
2.0	2.5	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.5	

TOTAL SAMPLE
RAISED UNITARIAN UNIVERS.

TOTAL WOMEN
TOTAL MEN

TOTAL LAYPERSONS
TOTAL CLERGY

FEMALE CLERGY
FEMALE CLERGY RAISED UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

MALE CLERGY
Raised UU
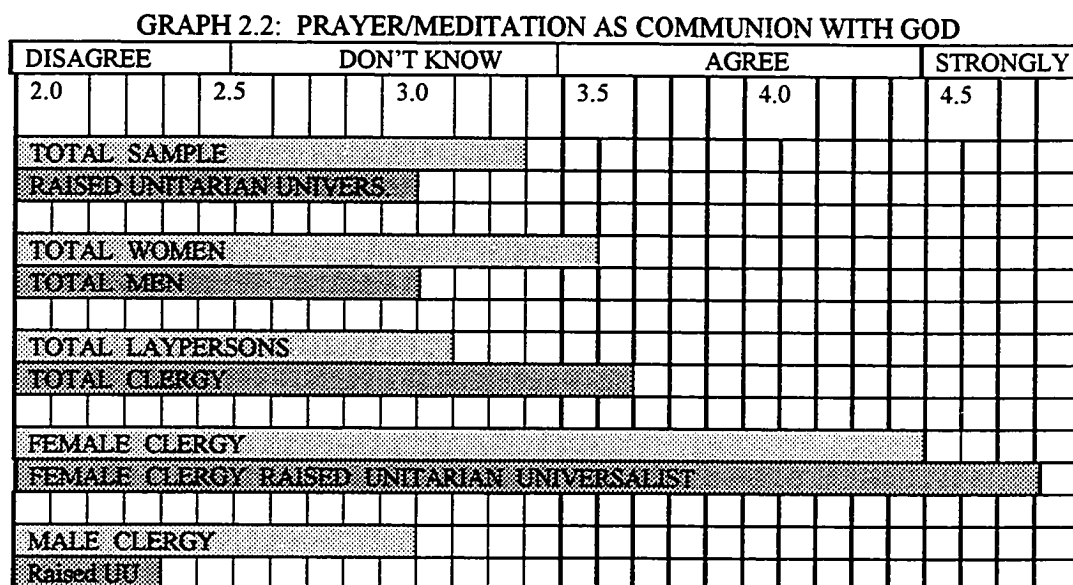
The next rank-ordered response, "intercession for others" as a purpose for prayer/meditation, is one with which the total population tends to disagree. The mean is weighted by the 21 percent who "strongly disagree." There was 38 percent agreement, somewhat higher than the 30 percent in the 1987 UUA study (and dramatically above the 9 percent in 1967).[3] Again, separating by gender (and generation, to be discussed in the next chapter) makes an interesting picture. See Graph 2.3 on the next page.

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[3] Ibid., 35.

GRAPH 2.3: INTERCESSION FOR OTHERS AS A PURPOSE FOR PRAYER/MEDITATION
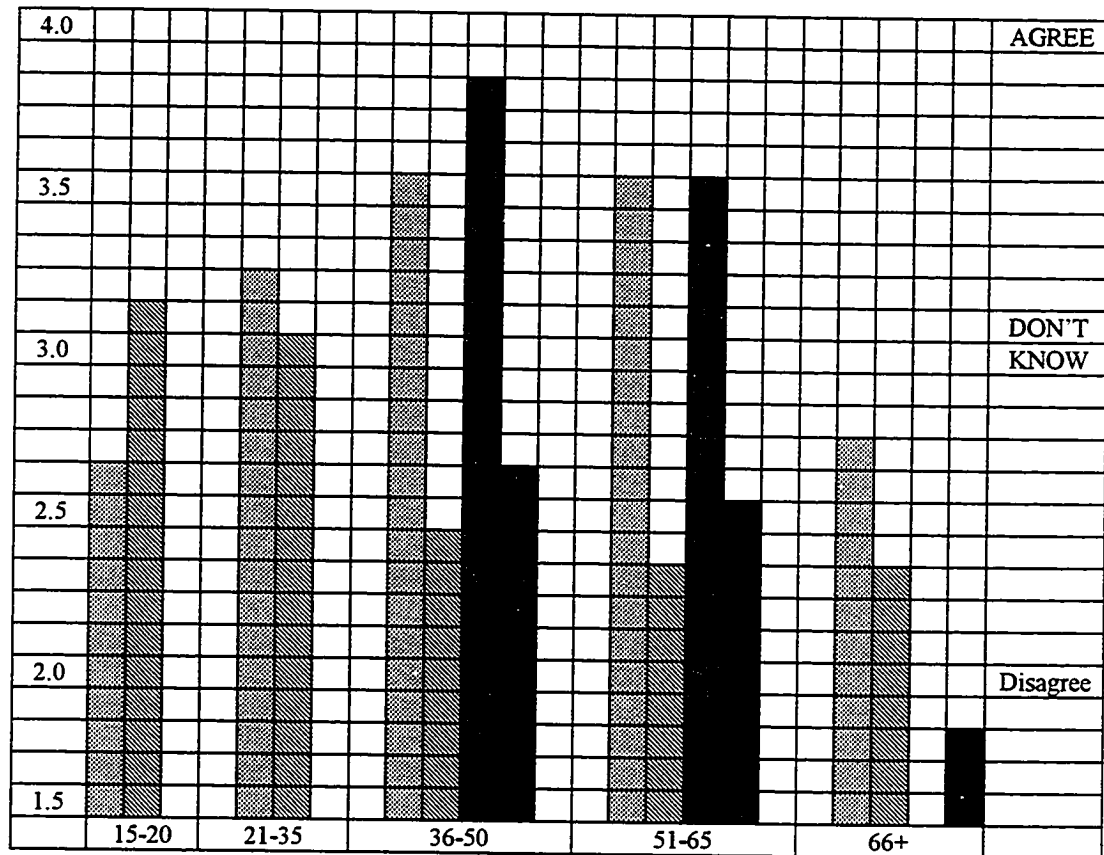
	TOTAL WOMEN		CLERGY WOMEN
	TOTAL MEN		CLERGY MEN

A correlation was run between frequency of church attendance and frequency of prayer/meditation. There was not a correlation between childhood church attendance and current prayer/meditation frequency. However, there was a strong correlation between current church attendance and frequency of prayer/meditation (at .277 where .15 is significant).

<div align="center">Religious Beliefs</div>

Influences upon Beliefs

One of the most informative questions asked in this study concerns the influence of a number of factors upon the informant's belief system. Table 2.2 presents the mean scores from highest to lowest for the sample as a whole, and also for those informants who were raised Unitarian Universalist. Essentially no difference appears in mean scores between these two groups except on one item: childhood teachings. Those raised Unitarian Universalist are more likely to consider their childhood teachings an important influence upon their convictions than those raised in other faiths (or in none).

<div align="center">TABLE 2.2: INFLUENCES UPON RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS</div>

On a 5 point scale from "none" to "greatly"	ALL	UUraised
1) Personal experience	4.51	4.6
2) Intuition	4.26	4.3
3) Reading and Study	4.04	3.9
4) Reason	4.02	4.0
5) Ideas of people you respect	3.95	4.0
6) Experiences of people you respect	3.69	3.8
7) Childhood Teachings	3.31	3.7

Gender was an influence upon five of these categories, as demonstrated by t-score correlations. Men gave more importance to "reading and study" (4.16 to 3.92), "reason" (4.12 to 3.93), and less importantly to "childhood teachings (3.41 to 3.20). Women gave more importance to the experience of others (3.86 to 3.56), and intuition (4.33 to 4.17). The order remains the same with one exception: for women, "Reason" drops below "Ideas of people you respect" as an influence on their belief system.

Correlations were run between the responses to this question regarding influences upon religious beliefs and church attendance as a child. Positive t-score correlations were found with: childhood teachings (.285), reading and study (.227), and ideas of respected others (.148). This last score is of borderline significance for a sample of this size.[4]

Current high church attendance also correlates with reading and study as an influence (.200), but not at all with the other two. It additionally correlates with "personal experience" as a source of belief (.184), and with intuition (.147 - borderline).

Correlations were run between these influences upon belief and frequency of prayer or meditation. The highest correlation with an active prayer/meditation life is, perhaps not surprisingly, "intuition" (.332 – very high). A close second is experience of respected others (.326). There is a moderate correlation with "personal experience" (.257), and modest correlations with "childhood teachings" (.193) and "reading and study" (.189). "Reason" comes in last with a slight inverse correlation, not large enough to be statistically significant.

Correlations between the sources of influences themselves show by far the highest correlation between "personal experience" and "reading and study" (.422). The two next-highest correlations move in opposite directions from this pair: "reading and study" correlates with "reason" (.351), while "personal experience" correlates with "intuition" (.308) – an interesting pattern. "Personal experience" does not correlate with "reason," but it does correlate with experience of respected others (.226), and modestly with "childhood teachings" (.170). Strong influence of childhood teachings correlates more with experience of respected others (.259), "intuition" (.252), and "reading and study" (.223). "Reason" is on the borderline (.145).

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[4] A .1 t-score represents likely occurrence by chance, while scores over .15 for a sample this size are progressively more significant This contrasts with f-score correlations used later for double correlations. where .1 begins to be significant, but .001 is considerably more conclusive.

Beliefs Concerning God

This study included three questions about God concepts. Two of these were from the UUA studies of religious life in congregations. Direct comparison of results is made difficult by the fact that many informants gave more than one answer, even when instructed otherwise (perhaps a commentary upon the complexity of Unitarian Universalist beliefs). So the percentages total more than 100 percent. The first question was: "Which one of the following statements comes closest to expressing your beliefs about God?"[5] Answers, in order of preference, are shown on table 2.3.:

TABLE 2.3: STATEMENT CLOSEST TO BELIEFS ABOUT GOD

63%	"God" may appropriately be used as a name for some natural process within the universe, such as love or creative evolution.
39%	"God" is the ground of all being, real but not adequately describable
5.8%	God: is an irrelevant concept, and the central focus of religion should be on human knowledge and values
2.6%	"God" is a concept that is harmful to a worthwhile religion.
2.6%	"God" is a supernatural being revealed in human experience and history.

Correcting for split answers gives the same order. The first rank definition has 57 percent, the second has 33 percent, the third has 5 percent, and the bottom two remain at 2.6 percent. The choice "God is an irrelevant concept" varies most from the 1987 UUA study, in which nearly four times as many subjects agreed.[6] Again, the current study population demonstrates less negativity towards traditional religious concepts than former study populations. It does, however, appear that these concepts are somewhat redefined by subjects of the current study. This observation is supported by answers to the two remaining questions about God concepts and imagery which were part of this study.

The second question from the UUA study is: "The way I would describe the divine for myself —". Multiple answers were even more common to this question. It is of interest that 88 percent of the

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[5] UUA, Quality of Religious Life, 34.
[6] Ibid., 34.

participants chose one or more positive descriptive terms for the Divine. Of these, however, only seven

chose the more traditional description of "Superior being. "Creative force" (#1) and "Highest potential"

(#4) are descriptions which fit the model of God described most often in Process Theology. "Harmony

with nature" (#2) is in accord with naturalistic theism. "Unknowable power" (#3) parallels the Tillichian

"Ground of Being" imagery from the first question. See Table 2.4 for preferred descriptions for the

entire population, for all those raised Unitarian Universalist, and for clergy of all backgrounds.

TABLE 2.4: "THE WAY I WOULD DESCRIBE THE DIVINE FOR MYSELF"

	ALL	UUraised	Clergy
1) Creative force	52.3%	48.8%	62.1%
2) Harmony with nature	36.8%	48.8%	22.4%
3) Unknowable power	19.4%	13.9%	27.6%
4) Highest potential	18.7%	20.8%	17.2%
5) Don't know or uncertain	14.8%	13.9%	3.5%
6) Superior being	4.5%	2.3%	5.2%
7) Meaningless	1.3%	2.3%	0%
8) Harmful concept	.6%	0%	0%

While direct percentage comparisons with the UUA studies are not possible because of the

prevalence of multiple answers in the current study, comparing the ranking of responses is informative.

"Creative power" gained first place in both studies. However, in the current study, both "harmony with

nature" and "unknowable power" score substantially higher than in the earlier study, while "highest

potential" drops from second to fourth place. "Harmony with nature," in particular, polled double the

percentage of "highest potential," a dramatic change from the UUA study, where it scored a third

lower.[7] Interestingly, those in the current study raised Unitarian Universalist agreed with the UUA study

in their lower rating of "unknowable power."

The increased affirmation for describing the Divine as "Harmony with nature" becomes even

more striking among those participants in the current study raised Unitarian Universalist, for whom it

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[7] Ibid., 34

ties with "Creative force" as the most popular definition at 48.8 percent. Clergy raised Unitarian

Universalist agree, at 50 percent. However, of the clergy not raised within the denomination, only 10

percent agree with this description of the Divine. It would appear that this change in perception

concerning the nature of the Divine is emerging within our Unitarian Universalist ranks. This item is

also influenced by gender: 28 percent of the clergywomen chose it, while 18 percent of the clergymen

did. The increase in the number of ministers raised Unitarian Universalist may well be accelerating this

trend. As will be discussed later, many of these are women.

Clergy as a whole agreed in giving "creative force" first place, with no difference between men

and women. However, those raised Unitarian Universalist were less in agreement than the rest of the

clergy sample (56 percent to 65 percent). Perhaps not surprisingly, very few clergy chose "don't

know/uncertain" as a response, a significant contributing factor to the large percentage of the total

informant population who chose affirmative language in which to describe the Divine for themselves.

The 5 percent of the clergy who chose "superior being" were all male.

The third question about God concepts consists of a group of images gathered together for this

project. Informants were asked, "I conceive God as (check all that apply)." Responses are displayed in

Table 2.5. Again, the total sample is compared with those raised Unitarian Universalist and with clergy.

TABLE 2.5: "I CONCEIVE GOD AS:"

	ALL	UUraised	Clergy
1) The "Interconnected Web"	62.6%	69.8%	62.1%
2) A real power which is a part of all things	52.9%	53.5%	63.8%
3) A human creation -- functions to reinforce society's ideals	27.7%	34.9%	34.4%
4) A "being" with whom one can experience relationship	18.7%	13.9%	22.4%
5) A human creation- functions to preserve existing power structure	16.8%	9.2%	15.7%
6) A hypothetical ideal	14.8%	15.2%	10.4%
7) "The opiate of the masses"	5.2%	0%	0%
8) A separate, concrete reality	4.5%	4.6%	1.7%

It is immediately striking that the image of the "interconnected web," which has only been in common language usage within the tradition for less than a decade, should have become the most common response. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents selected it. Clergy and lay scores are consistent, but those raised Unitarian Universalist are substantially higher. Only one other definition appealed to over half the subjects: God is "a real power which is a part of all things." This answer was also the first choice of the clergy (11 percent higher than the combined sample, which means about 16 percent higher than the laity). It is clear that Unitarian Universalism's God (if this sample is typical) is an immanent or interconnected God. The transcendent definition of God as "a separate, concrete reality" came in last, only appealing to seven people, only one of whom was clergy.

A look at cluster patterns shows that answers #2 and #4 have more than a simple percentage advantage. Thirty-six respondents chose one or the other of these answers alone; another 56 chose both, and an additional 31 chose combinations including at least one of these. Together, they represent 83 percent of the numerical sample. While those raised Unitarian Universalist, as a whole, are consistent with this norm, the clergy who were raised Unitarian Universalist come in higher, at 89 percent. While male clergy as a whole are consistent with the overall norm, 100 percent of the women clergy chose this cluster of definitions! This would be an interesting observation to test against a larger sample.

There is one other cluster: 14 subjects chose #5, #6, or #7 alone, while another 10 combined them for a total of 16 percent of the respondents, including male clergy at 15 percent (and no women clergy). Only one response did not fit one of these two clusters. For balance and ambiguity, note that nearly half of the respondents in the first cluster who had multiple answers also included at least one of the second cluster responses (this includes a third of the female clergy). Unitarian Universalist concepts of the Divine do appear to be multiple, and sometimes contradictory. But the dominant image has considerable strength and more consensual agreement than might have been expected, at least within this limited sample.

Life after Death

One of the questions included to allow cross-comparison with UUA Commission on Appraisal studies concerns belief in "some form of life after death."[8] In the current study, almost half the respondents took the "don't know" option on this question, while the remainder were splint – 29 percent "yes" and 22 percent "no." This represents a doubling of agreement over the most recent UUA study (1987), where 46 percent said "no," 38 percent were not sure, and only 15 percent agreed (in 1967, 89 percent disagreed with a more concretely worded version of the question). There was a strong gender difference in responses. Half again as many women as men (35 percent to 23 percent) gave a "yes" response, while twice as many men as women (31 percent to 14 percent) said "no."

Belief in a sense of purpose to life "beyond that which I create" fairs better yet. Of the total sample, 52 percent answered "yes," while only 14 percent said "no." Interestingly, the gender factor is reversed: more men said "yes" (59 percent to 46 percent), while slightly more women answered "no." More women than men were undecided.

Subjective Religious Experiences

Pattern of Experiences: Frequency

The experiences studied were divided into two clusters, the first cluster being understood by the writer to be more universal (an assumption supported by research statistics). For discussion purposes, these two groups of experiences will be referred to as Cluster 1 and Cluster 2. All were rated from "1" (never) to "5" "frequently," with "3" as "average."

Cluster 1 experience questions include: "A sense of oneness/harmony," "sudden strong feelings of light/joy," and a "sense of intuitive certainty." The means on these three are close:

1) Sense of oneness/harmony	3.66
2) Sense of intuitive certainty	3.61
3) Sudden strong feelings of light/joy	3.46

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[8] Ibid., 37

All these mean scores are above "average" (3) tending towards "commonly experienced" (4). In numbers, only four, five and nine people claimed never to have experienced these states of being (3 percent-6 percent). Another 14 percent to 15 percent of the subjects answered "rarely," while for 18 percent to 23 percent these experiences are frequent. The remaining approximately 60 percent are in the "average" to "commonly" range. As anticipated, these types of experiences would appear to be nearly universal within this sample population, and probably within the community at large.

There is a high correlation between frequency of experiencing these three types of experiences – the same people tended to be similarly high on all of them. Nor are there significant differences between laypeople and clergy, with one exception. Clergywomen (but not clergymen) report a higher frequency for experiencing a sense of oneness or harmony.

Cluster 2 experience questions include: "A sense of 'felt' presence," "a 'voice'" and "a 'vision.'" These break into two groups, the first experience reported as more frequent than the others, although significantly less common than those experiences included in Cluster 1 (validating the writer's assumption). There is a particularly high correlation between voice and vision experiences – they tend to go together. In fact, several informants told me either description was inadequate, although as close as language comes to their perception of what occurred. These subjects also tend to experience the other four types of experiences with greater than average frequency. The mean scores on these questions are:

4) Sense of 'felt' presence	2.68
5) A 'voice'	1.81
6) A vision	1.76

Approximately three out of ten informants have never had any of these experiences. But it is interesting what a relatively large number have had them at least "rarely." Of those who took part in this study, 70 percent have experienced a "sense of 'felt' presence," 46 percent a "voice," and 43

percent a vision. Clergy tend to somewhat more frequency for sense of "felt" presence, although not for voice or vision. More significantly, four times as many laypeople as clergy say they have never had a "presence" experience. Women are more likely to have had voice experiences than men, and even more so vision experiences. Age correlations will be considered in the following chapter.

Feeling Responses

Two pairs of questions were included to gauge feeling response to these two clusters of experiences. The first asks how frequently the subject has felt comforted, or conversely, frightened, by the experiences. There was a modest tendency to be more comforted by the experiences included in Cluster 1, but more frightened by the experiences included in Cluster 2. Likewise, for the second pair, informants felt more loving in response to the experiences included in Cluster 1 than those in Cluster 2. The fourth feeling, "more detached," does not vary significantly. The responses, in descending order , are reported in Table 2.6.

TABLE 2.6: FEELING RESPONSES TO DESCRIBED EXPERIENCES

FEELINGS: Mean frequencies on a scale of 1 to 5:	Clust 1	Clust 2
1) Comforted	3.95	3.81
2) Loving	3.82	3.61
3) Detached	2.26	2.29
4) Frightened	1.85	2.06

Taken as a whole, there is no significant gender difference in frequency of feeling comforted or frightened. Clergy, however, reported a significantly stronger sense of feeling comforted than laypeople. While "frightened" may be the least common feeling response, half of the informants have been frightened at some time by even the experiences in Cluster 1, while 57 percent (of those who have had them) have been frightened by Cluster 2 experiences. This issue will be discussed in the next Chapter, since it shows significant age correlations.

Understanding and Valuing

Influences upon Beliefs

Informants were asked to rate the degree each cluster of experiences has strengthened or changed their convictions regarding: "yourself," "your directions in life," the divine/God, an afterlife, and human "soul" or "spirit." For Cluster 2 experiences, informants were also asked whether there had been any change in their convictions concerning "Jesus or other guide" and "the demonic." Only those who answered affirmatively to experiences in Cluster 2 were to respond to these questions. Table 2.7 offers a comparison (on 1 to 5 scale).

TABLE 2.7: EXPERIENCES CHANGED OR STRENGTHENED BELIEFS ABOUT:

Mean frequencies on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (frequently):	Clust 1	Clust 2
1) Yourself	3.83	3.58
2) Your directions in life	3.60	3.43
3) The divine/God	2.94	3.27
4) An afterlife	2.13	2.33
5) A human 'soul' or 'spirit'	3.12	3.33
6) The demonic		1.70
7) Jesus or other 'guide'		2.09

There would seem to be two distinct clumps here. The first two questions refer to convictions concerning oneself, and appear here to be more influenced by the Cluster 1 experiences. The remaining three questions asked concern more traditional religious subjects (God, afterlife, and soul). Changing beliefs in these areas are reported to be more influenced by Cluster 2 experiences. One caution should be kept in mind. Responses to Cluster 1 experiences were almost universal, while only those who have had Cluster 2 experiences responded to that section. It would be interesting to see if the pattern of associations would hold if the Cluster 2 means were compared to the Cluster 1 means for the same group of subjects, especially those subjects who report having had Cluster 2 experiences.

Although the mean frequency scores for this item come in lowest, a surprising number of these religious liberals have had some experience which has impacted their ideas about the demonic. About one subject out of five in the sample population reports having this response on at least rare occasions. This twenty percent of the total sample represents 44 percent of those informants who report having ever had voice, vision or presence experiences.

Influence upon Decision-making

Informants were asked to rate the influence of the two clusters of experiences upon their decision-making in five areas: risk-taking, relationships, religious affiliation, values, and service to the larger world. Again, only the informants who have had experiences in Cluster 2 answered for that cluster. The mean scores for these items are shown in Table 2.8.

TABLE 2.8: HAVE EXPERIENCES INFLUENCED YOUR DECISION-MAKING ABOUT:

Mean frequencies on a scale of 1 (never) to 5 (frequently):	Clust 1	Clust 2
1) Risk-taking	3.35	3.47
2) Relationships	3.49	3.45
3) Religious affiliation	2.94	2.89
4) Values	3.52	3.39
5) Service to the larger world	3.40	3.39

The first and most obvious pattern in this chart is that the experiences being studied are not commonly associated with religious conversion among Unitarian Universalists. Decisions about religious affiliation are dramatically less influenced by these experiences than the other areas named. The other scores are very close together. Differences between the two columns is also insignificant, with "values" being a little more highly associated with Cluster 1, and "risk-taking" with Cluster 2. For the sample population in general, the experiences are reported to influence decision-making with some frequency.

The item on relationship was tested for gender or lay/clergy correlations. For laity, there was a modest gender correlation (women reported being influenced more often). But for clergy, the

gender correlation is quite significant. While male clergy do not vary significantly from the laity, clergywomen reported a strikingly high impact of these experiences upon their relationships (mean score of 4.35).

<u>Understandings of Subjective Experiences</u>

The final set of questions asked concerning the two clusters of experiences was prefaced with: "Whether or not you have had such experiences, do you understand them as ----"

Possibilities were rated from "strongly disagree" (1) through "don't know" (3), to "strongly agree" (5). Here the differences between Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 responses are interesting. Table 2.9 shows these responses in descending order of agreement (based upon Cluster 1 responses). Asterisks in the last column designate items where agreement is markedly higher for those respondents who report Cluster 2 experiences than for those who do not.

TABLE 2.9: "I UNDERSTAND SUCH EXPERIENCES AS: "

Mean scores on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):	Cluster 1	Cluster 2 --All	Cluster 2 no exper	Cluster 2 experience
1) Having positive value	4.35	3.87	3.2	4.2*
2) Containing Truth	4.10	3.77	3.0	4.0*
3) Real interconnectedness	3.92	3.62	2.8	4.6 **
4) Trustworthy guide	3.77	3.36	2.7	3.7*
5) Message from unconscious	3.63	3.71	3.5	
6) Shaped by beliefs	3.47	3.57	3.5	
7) Encountering "God"	3.12	3.05	2.5	3.7*
8) Projected expectation	2.81	3.04	3.1	
9) Originating outside self	2.58	2.65	2.2	2.7
10) Physiological "accident"	2.32	2.64	2.9	2.5
11) Protective illusion	2.28	2.67	3.1	
12) Irrelevant	1.73	2.01	2.4	
13) Harmful	1.51	2.00	2.7	1.8*

The most interesting thing about this table is that significant differences between scores for Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 experiences occur at the high and low ends of the table. The four items

for which there is most agreement and the four items with which there is least agreement are the ones with substantial differences. These "understandings" are clustered in clear three groups. Informants tend to agree with the first six items, not to know about the middle two, and to disagree with the remaining five. Differences between understandings of Cluster 1 experiences and Cluster 2 experiences are most marked for three items. Using Cluster 1 scores as a base point, Cluster 2 experiences are: considered more harmful (+.49), as having less positive value (-.48), and being a less trustworthy guide (-.41). As a group, the subject population valued Cluster 2 experiences less positively than Cluster 1 experiences.

The relative ratings for "having positive value," "containing truth," and being a "trustworthy guide" are interesting -- a .58 and .51 spread for Clusters 1 and 2 respectively. There is more agreement that the experiences have some positive value than that they contain truth, and more that they contain truth than that they are trustworthy on a regular basis. The three items create a sliding scale for truth and value claims.

Clergy informants were significantly more likely than members of the laity to understand Cluster 1 experiences as "real interconnectedness" and as "encountering God." Within the clergy sample, these scores additionally correlate with gender. In addition, clergywomen more than any other group report their conviction that Cluster 2 experiences can be a "trustworthy guide." Women in general understand both experience clusters as "real interconnectedness," and believe with higher frequency than male subjects that these experiences are trustworthy.

The researcher considers the more negative evaluation of Cluster 2 experiences by the population as a whole to be misleading. Approximately one-third of the respondents reported never having these experiences, and initially their understandings were not statistically separated from those of the subjects who did report these experiences. While the sample population as a whole does report less positive understandings to Cluster 2 experiences than to those included in

Cluster 1, the researcher's expectation was that this difference would not hold for those subjects who reported having had the identified experiences. A statistical check separating out the mean scores of non-experiencers and experiencers on key items demonstrated that there was in fact a substantial variance in scores. Those who have had these experiences understand them differently (and more positively) from those who have not (see Table 7). These "experiencers" also report more similar understandings of the two clusters of experiences than do other subjects. One substantial and revealing difference which this comparison brings to light is that those who have had Cluster 2 experiences understand them overwhelmingly as "real interconnectedness" (4.6 on a 5.0 scale). In contrast, non-experiencers tend to disagree with this interpretation. Experiencers also indicate substantially more agreement with all three positive valuing statements (by a 1.0 margin). They are more likely to understand their experiences as "encountering God" (3.7) and as not harmful.

Correlations were run, validating the strong probability that subjects with a high frequency of both Cluster 1 and Cluster 2 experiences will be more likely to interpret them as "encounter with God" and/or "real interconnectedness." High frequency of these experiences also correlates with high frequency of prayer/meditation and recognizing "communion with God" as a purpose for prayer/meditation.

Correlations were also run between the tendency to affirm reason as a "great" influence upon one's religious convictions and various understandings of the identified experiences. Reason as a strong influence upon beliefs only correlated significantly with one understanding: seeing Cluster 2 experiences as "protective illusion."

On the other hand, for all six identified experiences, reported frequency correlates highly with "intuition" as a strong influence upon convictions. It also correlates highly with understanding these experiences to have positive value, to be trustworthy, and to be evidence of

"real interconnectedness." A more modest correlation was discovered between the influence of intuition and understanding of these experiences as "encountering God." These various interpretations are all positively correlated with each other as well.

Not surprisingly, negative correlations were discovered between considering these experiences of positive value and considering them as "physiological 'accident,'" "protective illusion," or "irrelevant." Judging the experiences "irrelevant" also correlates with explanations based upon physiology or illusion.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

These general findings demonstrate that patterns of subjective religious experience of the specific types designated are, in fact, occurring among Unitarian Universalists with substantial frequency. The first cluster of experiences are nearly universal, while the second cluster is less common. Interpretations are related to frequency of experience, sources of religious convictions, gender, lay-clergy identity, and age (which will be addressed in the next chapter). They also correlate with frequency of prayer/meditation. These experiences are reported to be influential change agents in the lives of the informants, influencing both ideas and decision-making.
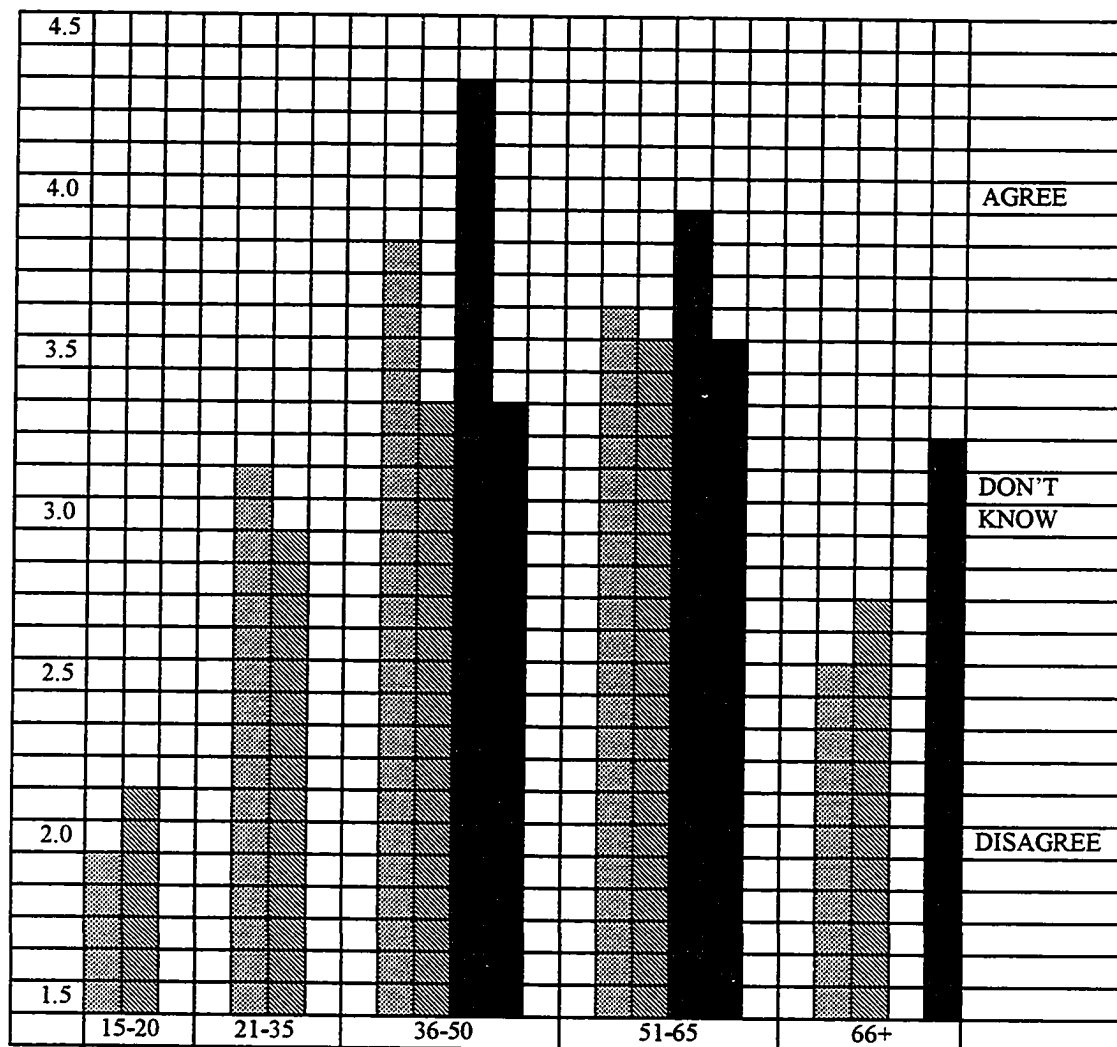
CHAPTER 3

Research Findings: The Generations

Demographics

In preparation for this study, an active effort was made to recruit subjects representing a full

spectrum of age groups. Once the few respondents between 20 and 26 were incorporated into the

same group as those 26-35, all age/gender categories had at least five respondents, the bare

minimum for testing statistical validity. The smallest group, that of males between 15-20, must

be treated with some reservation about how well they represent their age group within Unitarian

Universalism, however. All these five young men were friends of the researcher's daughter, and

are observably more intuitive, artistic and aware of feelings than many others of their age group.

An example of a response that appears atypical is their high level of belief that

voice/vision/presence experiences are trustworthy. No other group expresses such high trust,

especially not the next-oldest group of males.

Several questions were tested for age-gender differences among clergy as well as the total

population. Only the two mid-life clergy groups, and the elder males, had sufficient

representation for statistical consideration, these are included in several informative graphs.

While there is not sufficient data to calculate age correlations for many items based upon clergy

alone, they contribute an added dimension to the larger picture.

TABLE 3.1: DISTRIBUTION OF STUDY POPULATION BY AGE GROUPS

Populations:	All	15-20	21-35	36-	51-65	66+
Lay women	55	10	11	17	6	13
Clergy women	25		1	9	12	3
Lay men	44	5	11	17	5	6
Clergy men	31			14	11	6

Statistical analysis of responses to a number of key questions strongly support the thesis statement concerning age-correlated differences interactive with gender. While the preponderance of clergy in the 51-65 age group must be taken into account, the graphs demonstrate less difference between clergy and the sample at large in this age group than in the younger mid-life group. Clergy women do account for much of the apparent generational difference, but not for all of it. They are themselves a manifestation of generational changes.

Separate cross-correlations were run for the clergy on some relevant items, and some comparisons were made between lay and clergy populations which were discussed in the last chapter. However, numbers were not large enough to correlate both age and lay/clergy identity simultaneously with definitive accuracy. Studies of larger separate samples of lay and clergy would be necessary to make more than tentative claims about the shift in perspective and experience within the Unitarian Universalist denomination.

<u>Religious Practice and Belief</u>

<u>Prayer and Meditation</u>

<u>Frequency of prayer or meditation</u>. Graph 2.1 in the preceding chapter showed that frequency of prayer/meditation was modestly correlated with gender, and correlated more substantially with clergy identity. Age group analysis shows a gradual increase through late mid-life, followed by a statistically significant drop for the 66+ population. In this case, the higher rate for the 51-65 group may be attributed largely to the number of clergy within that sample group. However, the drop in frequency for elders, especially elder males, is not so impacted, and the higher rate for women in that age group is one of the few places in this study where elder men and women differ more significantly than at other ages. Overall, frequency of prayer/meditation is less correlated with age than many of the items to be discussed later. Graph A.1 in the appendix illustrates this pattern.
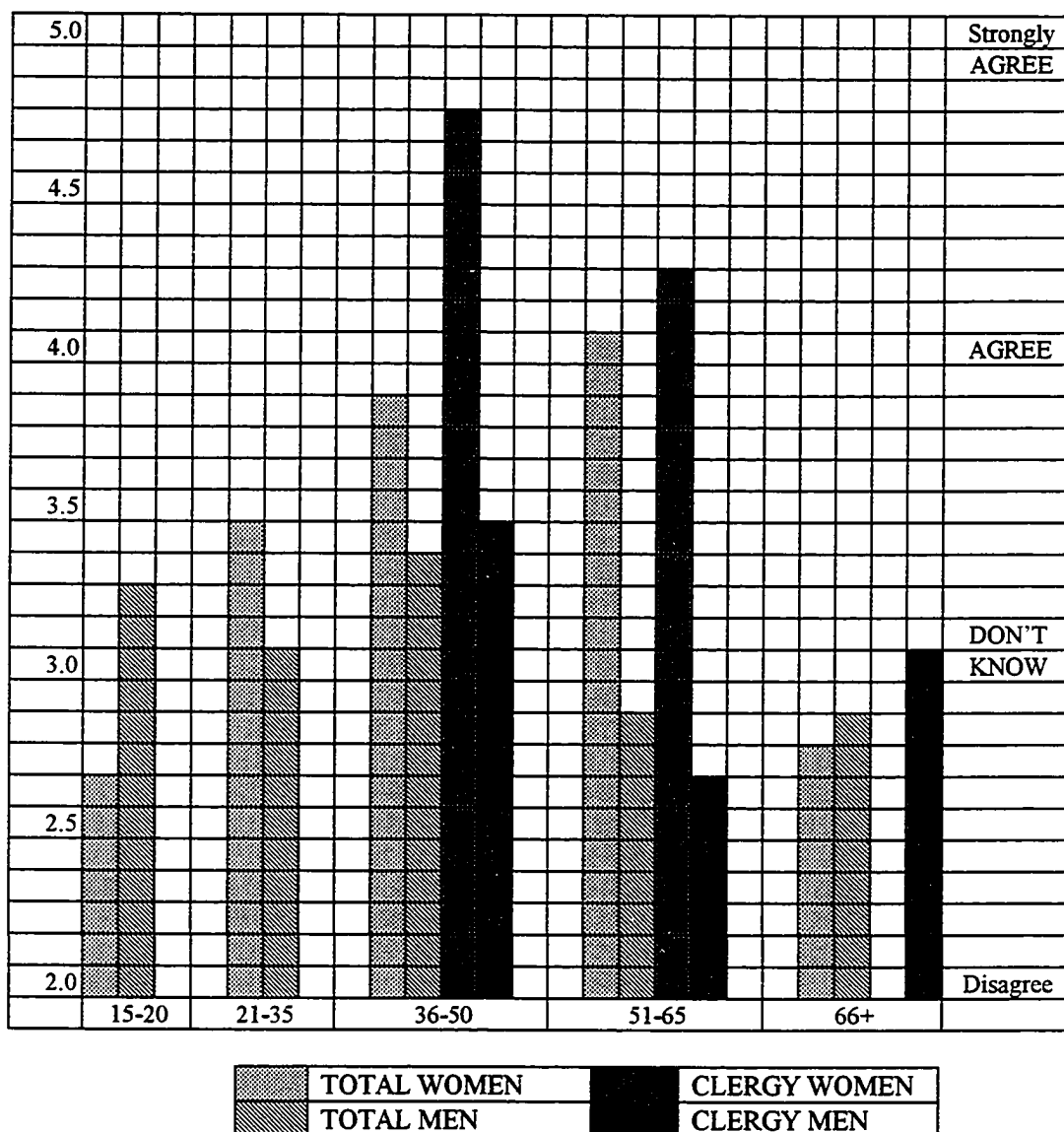
GRAPH 3.1

"COMMUNION WITH GOD" AS A PURPOSE FOR PRAYER/MEDITATION

	TOTAL WOMEN		CLERGY WOMEN
	TOTAL MEN		CLERGY MEN

Influences upon Beliefs

Only two of the list of influences upon religious conviction were selected for detailed analysis: reason and intuition. A spot check of the others shows only minor generational differences, while gender differences were already discussed in the preceding chapter.

"Intuition" as a source of convictions did not quite correlate with gender, nor with generation. As previously discussed, it does correlate significantly with clergy identity, and with frequency and interpretations of the studied experiences. On the other hand, "reason" as a source of convictions does correlate positively with increasing age. With the exception of the probably atypical youngest males, there is a direct linear relationship. In the mid-life groups, men have a modest edge on women, but the elder group is essentially identical. This is an important finding as we consider the striking shift in viewpoint among women between the elder group and those immediately following. Graph 3.2 shows this trend.

GRAPH 3. 2: INFLUENCE OF REASON ON CONVICTIONS

5.0					VERY STRONG
4.5					
4.0					STRONG
3.5					
3.0					AVERAGE
	15-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	65+

TOTAL WOMEN   TOTAL MEN
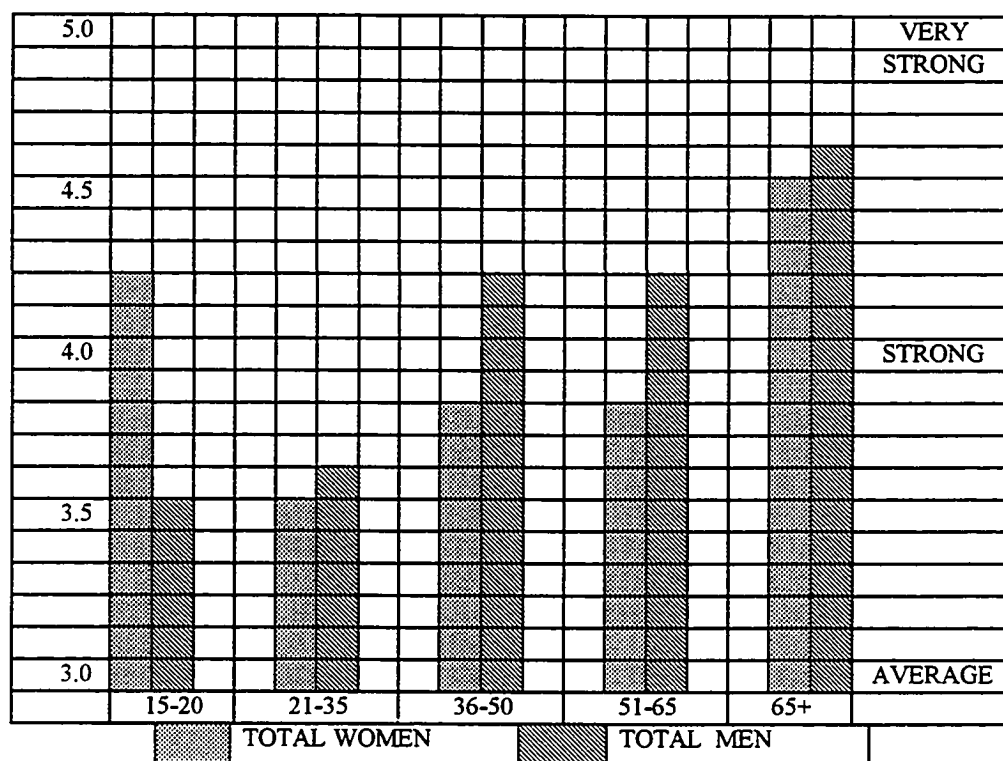
Computer age-correlations were not run on questions concerning beliefs about God. The multiplicity of answers per question made this difficult. However, a manual check was run comparing age and gender for the second and third questions concerning ideas about God and the divine, on the assumption that how subjects viewed the divine might well influence how they understood the experiences being studied.

Do different generations show clear trends concerning how they would describe the divine for themselves? There were some scattered age correlations, but not a clear pattern. Youth and elder women more often answered "Don't know/uncertain." Forty-two percent of young adult males chose "Highest potential," while none of their female age-mates did. Both groups of mid-life women came in next at 29 percent, while older males dropped – to only 8 percent for the elders. "Harmony with nature" was most popular with the young adults and the elder women. A large percentage of these young adults were raised Unitarian Universalist, and those raised in the tradition, regardless of age, tended to choose this item. It is not clear which factor is causative, if either, nor why elder women are also at 50 percent for this answer. "Unknowable power" appears to be a male preference among elders (33% to 0%), among young mid-lifers (29% to 8%), and among young adults (17% to 0%). "Creative force," highest overall, rates 47 percent and above for all groups except youth, coming in highest for mid-life women (who have a 15 percent lead over their male counterparts).

Responses to the question "I conceive God as —" showed somewhat more cohesion. Almost all of the small group who selected "A separate, concrete reality" were youth or young adults. A bell curve similar to the others this study has produced reflects agreement with perceiving God as "a real power which is a part of all things" (all groups stay in the range from 40 percent to 70 percent, a pattern which looks similar to that for understanding the studied experiences as "real interconnectedness"). Overall, as discussed previously, this answer was first

choice of the clergy, but the mid-lifers as a whole come in higher yet. God as "a 'being' with whom one can experience relationship," on the other hand, is an option selected with any frequency only by younger mid-lifers (women 42% and men 28%) and the elder males (33%; 0% females).

The conception of God as "the 'interconnected web'" rated highest for the subject population as a whole. It was popular with all groups except the youth (who were lowest at 40 percent regardless of gender). Beyond that, however, distribution was erratic. Young adult and young mid-life women were highest (80% and 79%), followed by elder women at 75 percent. Males show a bell-shaped distribution, peaking at 72 percent for younger mid-lifers. This answer tends to correlate with female gender, except for one anomaly. In the older mid-life group, the one which is two-thirds clergy, only 56 percent of the women agreed, compared to 69 percent of the men. Clergy as a whole came in at 70 percent, so this group of women do not fit the pattern. However, these sample groups are small, and it would be rash to generalize from them without further study with a larger population.

The researcher expected the more humanistic options to appeal to the senior population. However, in general that did not prove to be the case. The choice of God as "a human creation which functions to reinforce a society's ideals" was more gender- than age-related. In the younger three groups more males than females preferred this choice, but in the two older groups women chose it more often than men. (in the case of the elders 42% to 33%). The concept of God as "a human creation which functions to preserve the existing power structure" is a male-preference (60% youth and around 20% for the others), except in the elder generation, where only one of each gender agreed. God as "a hypothetical ideal" proved most popular with the youth and young adult males (the latter 36% to 0% for their female counterparts). It was not of interest

to mid-lifers, but 25 percent of both genders in the elder generation selected this answer -- something of a reverse bell curve for the males.

<div align="center">Subjective Religious Experiences</div>

Patterns of Experiences: Frequency

As discussed previously, the experiences about which informants were questioned were divided into two clusters of three experiences. Two of the first cluster of experiences showed significant generational differences: "sudden strong feelings of light/joy" and "a sense of intuitive certainty." For intuitive certainty, the most obvious difference is the drop in mean scores for those groups over 65. This is especially dramatic in the case of male laity, whose mean score is 2.2, rising to 3.7 in the next-youngest age group. Graph A.3 in the appendix illustrates this finding (laity extrapolated).

<div align="center">GRAPH 3.3: FREQUENCY -- "SUDDEN STRONG FEELINGS OF LIGHT/JOY"</div>

4.5					
4.0					COMMON
3.5					
3.0					AVERAGE
	15-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+
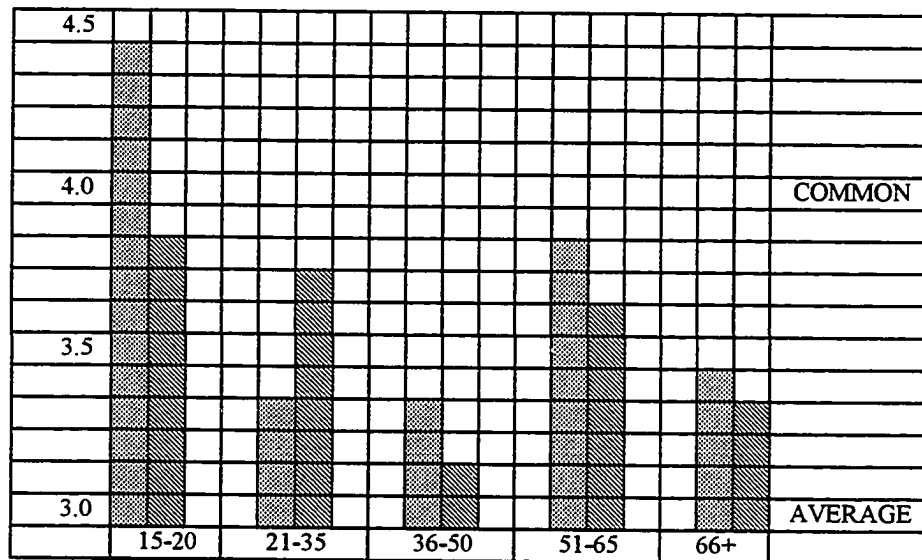
Feelings of light/joy are especially common for the youngest group of women, those between 15 and 20, dropping significantly for the next two groups of women, only to rise again somewhat for older mid-lifers. This last is probably in part clergy influence, although presence

of clergy does not bring up the scores of the younger mid-life group on this item. Females report

experiencing this feeling more than their male counterparts for all age groups except young

adult. Graph 3.3 shows this distribution

"Sense of oneness/harmony" scores are interesting, in that while all are high, scores for

women show an upward bell curve, high in the middle, while the male scores show a slight

inverse bell curve. The largest gender difference, as for many items in this survey is for young

mid-lifers. In this case, the only statistically significant variance is for between men and women

among the clergy. In particular, younger mid-life clergywomen score high; if they are removed

from the total sample, the remaining (lay) women would be just .3 higher than the males, as in

the next-eldest group. In contrast, clergy men in both mid-life groups have the same mean scores

as the total male sample. Graph A.3 in the appendix shows these trends.

GRAPH 3.4: FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCE: A "VOICE"
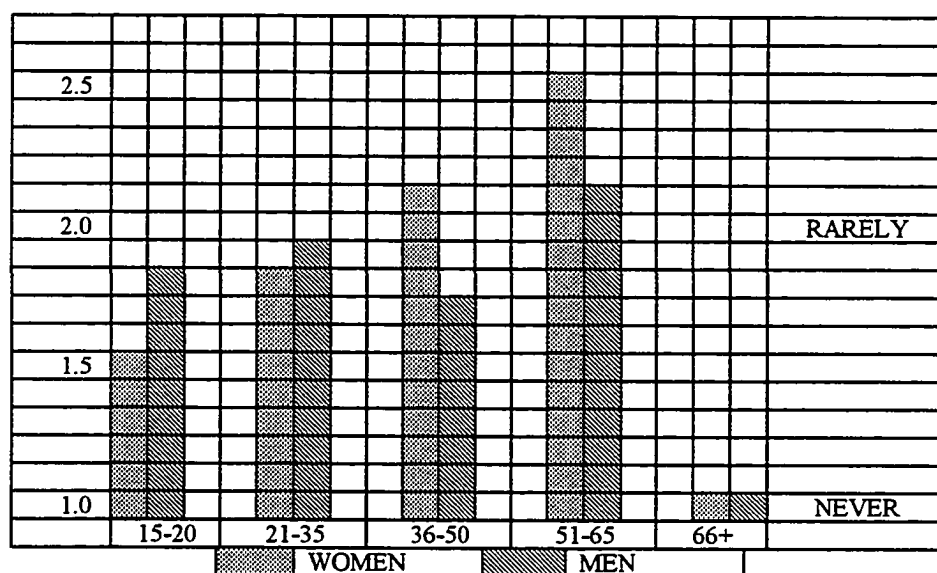
Sense of "felt" presence, voice and vision experiences are all correlated with generation.

For "presence," outside of the anomalous young males, all groups 65 and under report consistent

frequency of occurrence. For subjects over 65, however, the mean scores drop strikingly. While elders report "presence" experiences more frequently than voice or vision, the reported mean frequencies for both men and women on this item are still less than "rarely." See Graph A.4 in the appendix.

Patterns of experience for "voice" and "vision" are quite similar. Women show an upward progression by age through the older mid-life group , where men have the highest mean as well. Only the 51-65 age group of women report these experiences, on the average, more than rarely. Over 65, both genders drop down to "never" for mean frequency of occurrence. Why the dramatic shift from one generation to the next? This is one of the primary questions raised by this research. Mean scores on "vision" are illustrated in the appendix (Graph A.5).

Feeling Responses

Feeling responses of comfort and fright to Cluster 1 experiences were compared for age-related variance. For comfort, there was little or no difference in the first three age-groups. A rise in the late mid-life group may well be accounted for by the fact that it is two-thirds clergy, since a statistically significant correlation between frequency of comfort experience and clergy identity was found. The definite drop in this response from elders of both genders cannot be accounted for so easily, although clergy may account for the fact that this is the only group in which the male scores are a little higher. See Graph A.6 in the appendix.

The pattern for fright is more definite. There is an almost linear progression, correlating inversely with age. The youngest two groups have most often been frightened, approaching the mid-point on a five-point scale. Mid-lifers have been frightened "rarely" and elders not at all. As these are the mild, almost universal experiences the high rate of fear for young people is startling. It rises somewhat for Cluster 2 experiences, but not as much as the researcher expected. It appears the young have experiences they have no context within which to

understand. While their rate of experiencing is often as high as the mid-lifers, and always higher than the elders, they do not have the life practice or background within which to assess the meaning of what they experience. Graph 3.5 shows the relationship between age and "fright" responses.

3.5: CLUSTER 1 EXPERIENCES AS FRIGHTENING

						AVERAGE
2.5						
2.0						RARELY
1.5						
1.0						NEVER
	15-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+	
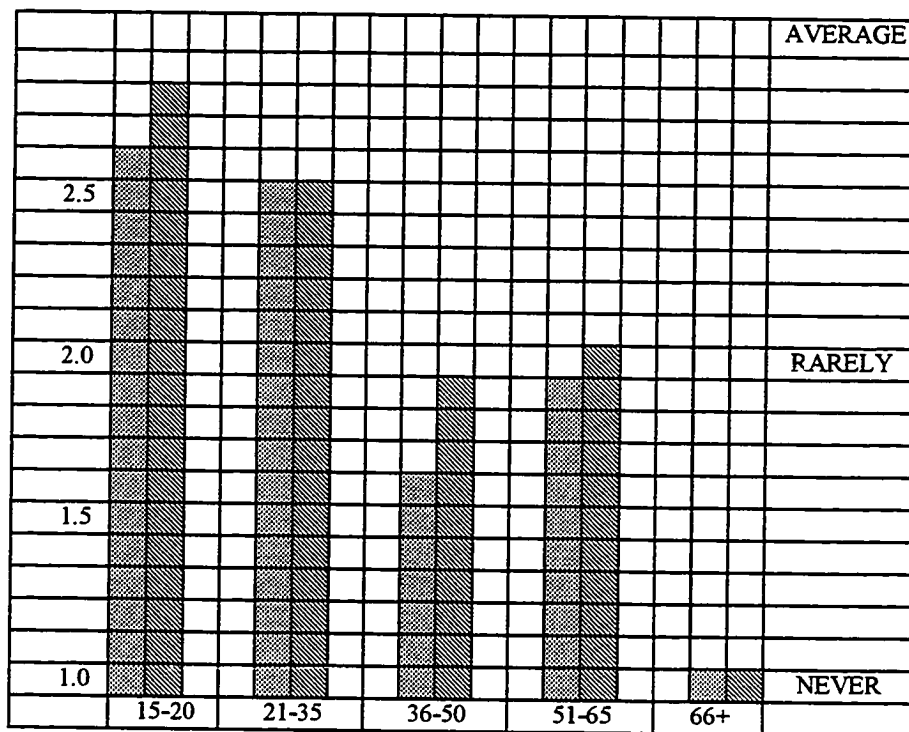
Understanding of Subjective Experiences

Correlations tests were run between several key understandings of the experiences being studied and age and gender of informants. Age was found to be significantly correlated with the following: "having positive value," being a "trustworthy guide," "real interconnectedness," "encountering God," and "irrelevant." Only one understanding on which age-correlation tests were run came in negative. In no age or gender group is there significant agreement that these experiences "originate outside self," and the level of disagreement remains constant.

Graph 3.1 (preceding this chapter) demonstrates a bell curve created by the mean scores computed by age and gender, a curve which appears with variations when many of these correlated items are graphed. For some items, the curve applies to both genders. But it is more striking for women, and in some cases only exists for women. As will be demonstrated, males show more consistent agreement across age cohorts than do females on a number of items.

As Graph 3.1 illustrates, understanding these experiences as "encountering God" correlates both with age and gender. The graph under consideration portrays response to Cluster 1 experiences; a similar graph for Cluster 2 experiences appears in the appendix (A.7). The two show strong similarities, although there is more variation in responses to Cluster 1, and these scores tend to be slightly higher than those for Cluster 2. There is more agreement that Cluster 1 experiences can be understood as "encountering God — until "non-experiencers" are removed (see Chapter 2), at which point the level of agreement jumps by .7. The Cluster 1 graph includes separate means for clergy because there were also significant differences between lay and clergy responses and between gender and age within the clergy.

The range on this item — from youth at 2.0 ("disagree") to the younger mid-life clergywomen at 4.3 (above "agree") is dramatic. Elders come in at around 2.6, young adults around 3.0, and the two mid-life groups at around 3.6. There appears to be no significant difference by gender among the laity on this item for Cluster 1 (although there is for Cluster 2). Mid-life male clergy do not differ from their age-gender cohorts as a whole. Mid-life clergy women, however, are a different story, as are the elder male clergy. The younger mid-life women clergy account for most of the edge which women have over men in that age group. It must be kept in mind, however, that there were only nine of them in this study. Together, the two mid-life female clergy groups total 21, so some tentative conclusions can be suggested based

upon their combined patterns. But again, a follow-up study with a larger sample would be
necessary to validate the apparent influence of the clergy.

One of the more interesting patterns of response found in this study concerns the
understanding that the experiences inquired about are experiences of "real interconnectedness."
There is a strong tendency towards agreement on this item for Cluster 1 experiences in general,
and even more so for "experiencers" of Cluster 2 events. Scores tend to be about a half-point
lower on a five-point scale for Cluster 2 when all the respondents are considered, and there is a
clearer mid-life gender bias (women score higher). For comparison, graphs for both clusters are
shown below.

GRAPH 3.6 CLUSTER 1 EXPERIENCES AS "REAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS"
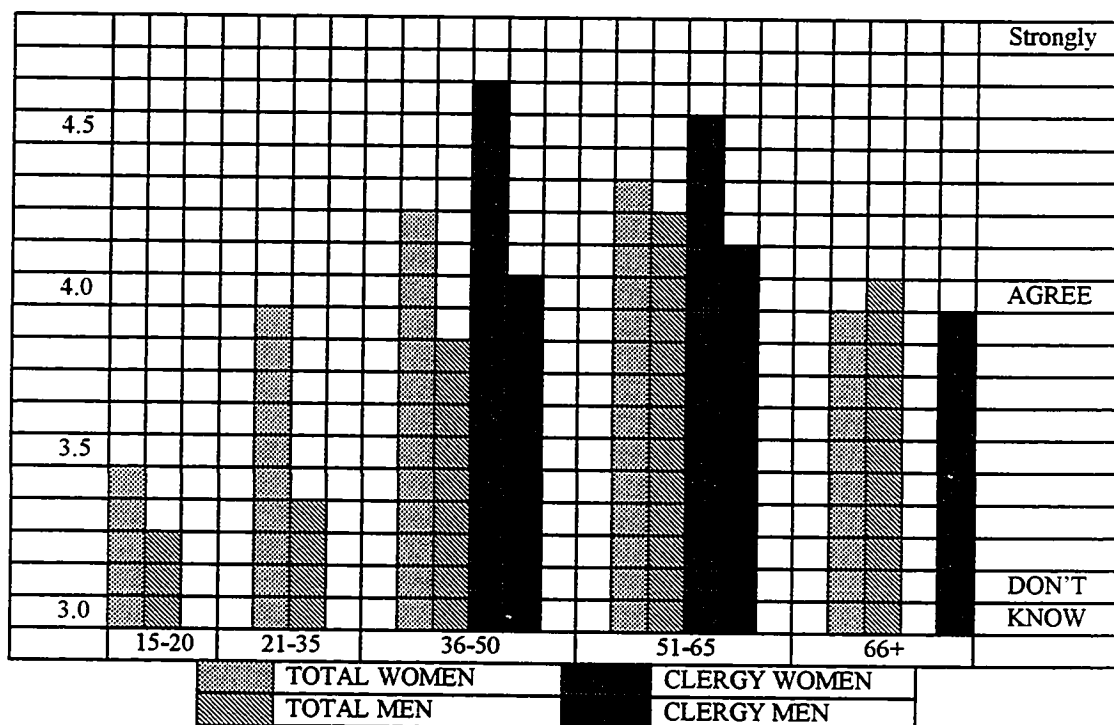
The overall high agreement that Cluster 1 experiences (and Cluster 2 experiences by those
who experience them) can be understood as "real interconnectedness" ties in with shifts in

theology within Unitarian Universalism to the more process/relational view of God. As discussed earlier, 83 percent of the participants in this study chose definitions of God consonant with this model. It is interesting that the elders agree only slightly less than the older mid-lifers on this one, when there is a striking rise between these two groups on experiential measures. Age is most significant here for the younger two groups, who agree less than their elders with this understanding. This is especially the case for young men (one informant pointed out that "everybody knows" young men do not feel "connected"). While this could be interpreted as a "failure" of religious education, it is more likely a reflection of developmental stages. For many people, it takes years of living to experience a dependable and ongoing sense of connectedness to the universe. For males in particular, agreement Cluster 2 experiences reflect "real interconnectedness" increases with age. Elders (although they rarely have these experiences!) show the highest mean agreement for men and are roughly equal for women if the mid-life clergywomen "bump" is disregarded. This finding seems paradoxical.

GRAPH 3.7: CLUSTER 2 EXPERIENCES AS "REAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS"
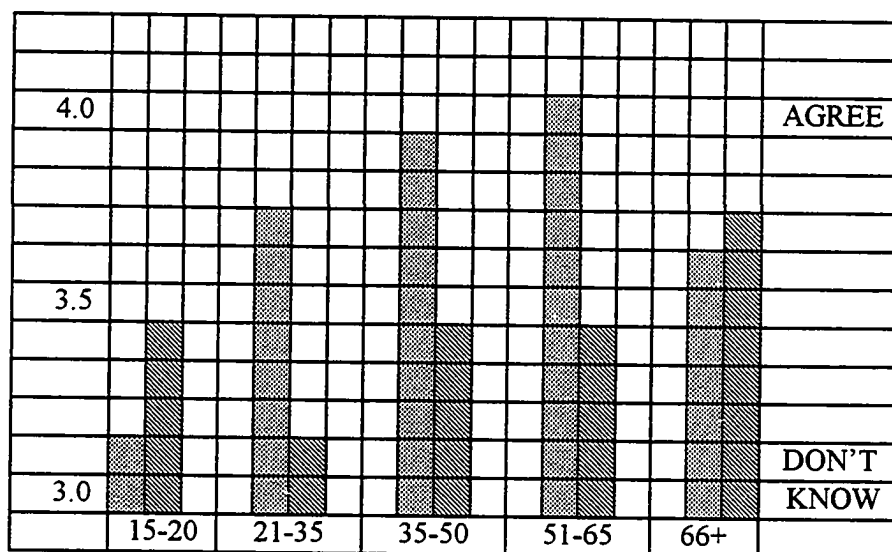
For comparison, understandings of the two clusters of experiences as "protective illusion" and as "physiological 'accident'" were checked for generational differences. All four of these items showed a similar pattern, but it was more of a "w" graph than a bell graph. For both clusters, the youth agreed most, followed by elders and then younger mid-lifers, with one exception: elders agreed least that Cluster 1 experiences were physiologically triggered. It seems possible that greater awareness of the effects of drugs among the younger age groups (beginning with the "boomers") influenced their interpretations. The interpretation as "illusion," however, appears to have different triggers for different age groups. The youth, whose mean score on seeing Cluster 1 as "illusion" is 3.3 (compared to 2.3 for the total population) and the young mid-lifers may be thinking of the possibility of drug influence. The elders, on the other hand, may be coming from a highly rational perspective (as illustrated by the correlation between the "illusion" interpretation and "reason" as a strong influence on convictions, and the linear correlation of the latter with age).

Value Interpretations

Is there a difference in the way Unitarian Universalists of various ages assign value to the experiences addressed in this study? For this sample population anyway, the statistical data strongly supports a positive answer to this question. Especially for women, there is a strong correlation between age group and the relevance, value, and trustworthiness assigned to these experiences.

Are these experiences considered irrelevant? The study population as a whole disagrees. However, where mean scores for males holds steady around 2.0 (disagree), scores for women show their frequent bell curve, this time inverted, since the question is phrased negatively. The youngest and eldest women score 2.7 and 2.5, both young adult and older mid-life women score 1.9, and the younger mid-life women drop to 1.4 -- approaching "strongly disagree" (see Graph 3.8).

By contrast, for Cluster 1 the middle flattens out for women, while for men age variations appear similar to those for women. The exception is the young adult group of males, who are slightly more inclined than the youngest males, and considerably more likely than their female age-mates, to consider the Cluster 1 experiences irrelevant. Graph A. 8 in the appendix illustrates this shift.

GRAPH 3.8: ARE CLUSTER 2 EXPERIENCES IRRELEVANT?

	15-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+	
3.0						DON'T KNOW
2.5						
2.0						DISAGREE
1.5						
1.0						DISAGREE STRONGLY
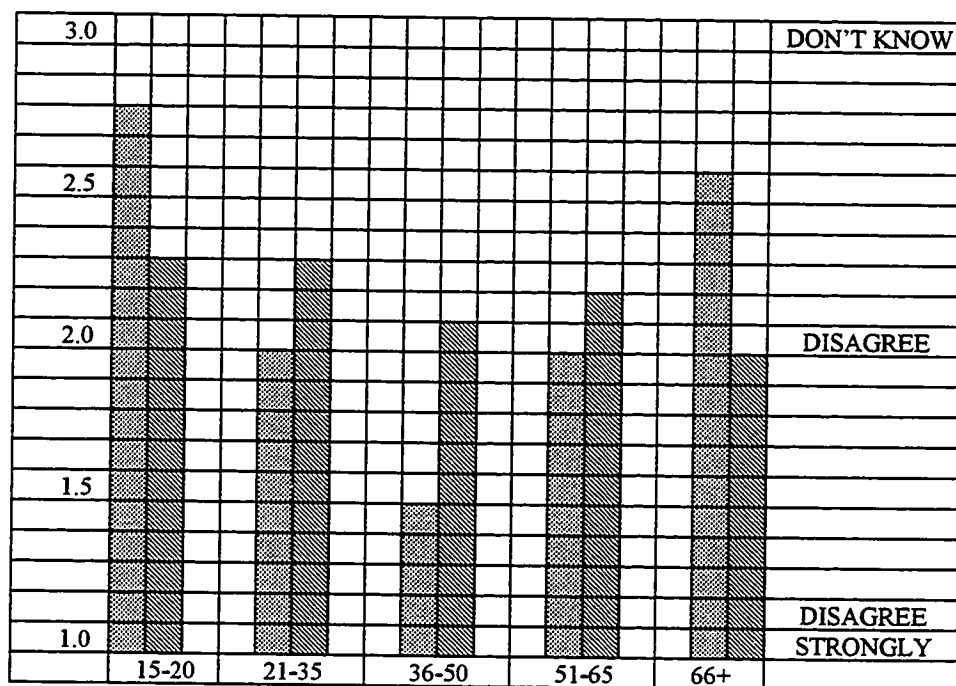
While women show more striking age differences in according positive value and trustworthiness to their experiences, the "curve" is not as even for Cluster 2 experiences as for those in Cluster 1. For Cluster 2, the two younger groups of women accord these experiences less positive value and trust than do the two eldest groups. Younger mid-life women, lay and clergy, maintain their lead in positive valuing. Men show more variation on valuing and trusting than they do concerning relevance. The researcher considers the exceedingly high mean score for male youth to be somewhat anomalous. Among the other age groups, later mid-life men tend to give more

positive value and trustworthiness to these experiences than other groups of men. As Graph 3.9 illustrates, this tendency can be attributed to the strong presence of clergy in this age sample. On the other hand, among elders, both clergy and lay men are more skeptical. The younger mid-life men, along with elders of both sexes, make a distinction between positive valuing and considering experiences trustworthy, especially with Cluster 2 experiences (valuing is higher than trusting). This mid-life dip in trust may connect with the boomer generation's greater tendency to consider the experiences possibly illusion or physiological accident, for similar reasons.

Graph 3.9 (following) shows the influence of clergy upon the question of trustworthiness, as well as the Cluster 2 pattern for the population as a whole. Cluster 1 patterns for trustworthiness, and Cluster 2 scores for "positive value" can be found on Graphs A.9 and A.10 in the appendix.

GRAPH 3.9

CLUSTER 2 EXPERIENCES UNDERSTOOD AS A "TRUSTWORTHY GUIDE"
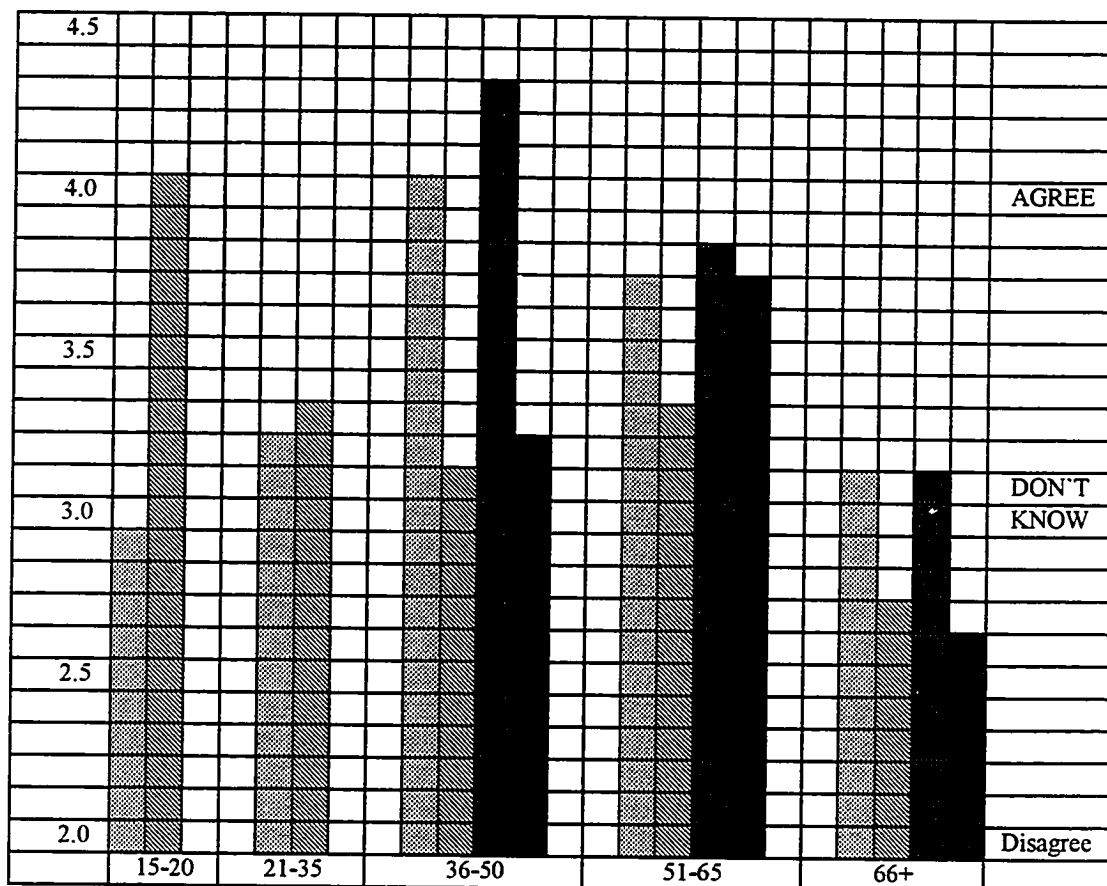
	TOTAL WOMEN		CLERGY WOMEN
	TOTAL MEN		CLERGY MEN

Reflections on Generational Patterns

Youth

While certain aspects of the picture for youth are affected by the atypical personalities of the small group of male youth available for study, a pattern does emerge. For three of the experiences studied, they differ as a group from the total study population. Experiences which they describe as "voice" or "vision" are rarer for the young women in this group than for any other group except elders. On the other hand, "sudden, strong feelings of light/joy" are more common to this age, especially for the young women. Youth are of all groups most likely to have responded to their experiences, even the "mild" ones, with fear, even though they are also rather commonly comforted by them. In general, the youth express more feeling responses to their experiences than do their elders.

Despite a higher frequency of experiences than the elder group, youth tend to be as likely as the elders to consider these experiences irrelevant. These young women are less likely to attribute positive value to these experiences, or to trust them, than any other group. The particular group of young men studied was more trusting and valuing of the experiences than their female counterparts. However, the youth as a group were much more inclined than others to suspect such experiences to be the result of illusion or of meaningless physiological accident (especially for Cluster 2, where they are the only group whose mean score crosses the mid-point into tending to agree — 3.3 compared to 2.3 for the general population).

Youth of both sexes are less likely than other age groups to experience Cluster 1 experiences as "real interconnectedness," and the females less likely than older women to experience Cluster 2 events as interconnectedness. They are also much less likely than even the elders to understand these experiences as "encountering God," and this, too, is especially the case for the young women.

Despite their attitudes towards the experiences discussed above, youth report a frequency for prayer/meditation only slightly lower than most other groups. In terms of how prayer/meditation is understood, this (probably atypical) sample of young men were more likely than their elders to consider communion with God and intercession for others as purposes for prayer, while the young women share the low point of these and other bell curves with the female elders, and are less in agreement with these purposes than their male counterparts. The most popular purposes for prayer/meditation, however, remain the inner directed purposes which rank high with all groups. These young people are less likely to depend upon reason (especially the males) and more likely to depend upon experience for forming their religious convictions than is the eldest group, which they resemble in other ways.

What about those convictions? Youth tended more than others to answer "don/t know/ uncertain" when asked how they would describe the divine for themselves (half of them gave this response). Four of the ten young women chose "harmony with nature" (none of the males), while two of the five young men chose "superior being" (none of the females). Three women and one young men chose "unknowable power, " while a third of them all named "creative force" (which came in highest with the sample population as a whole).

The youth are less a part of the growing theological consensus discussed earlier than their elders are. However, 40 percent of them conceive of God as "a real power which is a part of all things," and 40 percent also chose the image of the "interconnected web" (both responses were gender-balanced), with 60 percent of them selecting one or both of these answers, compared with 83 percent of the population at large. Half of them (more than any other age group) said they conceived God as "a hypothetical ideal." On the two "human creation" options, a strong gender bias appears; 80 percent of the boys chose " a human creation which functions to reinforce

society's ideals," and 60 percent chose "a human creation which functions to preserve the existing power structure." For both questions, young women were at 20 percent.

A picture emerges from this study of young people, many of whom do, in fact, have experiences others tend to call "religious" or "mystical," but who do not have much experience or exposure to context in which to understand or value them. Their own peer context provides some skepticism because of associations with drug experiences (although most of the young people in this study are drug-free), and perhaps contributes to the tendency to experience fear. While some of the lack of context may be considered developmental (it takes time and life experience to grow a sense of interconnectedness, especially for males in our culture), some of it is undoubtedly the product of the denomination's laisser faire approach to the religious education of its youth.

Young Adults

At first glance, the Unitarian Universalist young adults available to participate in this study were a diverse group who did not appear to have much in common. Many changes take place in the lives of young adults between the ages of 21 and 35. Many are not active church members at the moment, while a few have already begun their families, and are bringing them along for religious education. The diversity of the sample in terms of life situation reflects the reality of young adult life in our churches and culture.

Young adults report a frequency on all of the studied experiences close to the norm for the total population. On several, the males report slightly higher frequency than females: "light/joy," "intuitive certainty," and "vision" experiences. The first of these is interesting, since there is over a 1.0 drop from the youth to the young adult group for females on frequency of "light/joy" experiences. There are several other indicators that, as a whole, young adult women may be somewhat less confident and more anxious than their male counterparts (or more willing to

acknowledge this). However, the women do agree more than the men that these experiences represent "real interconnectedness," are significantly more likely than their younger sisters to see "communion with God" as a purpose for prayer, and are beginning to feel more favorably towards "intercessory prayer."

Both males and females are twice as likely as their youth counterparts to understand their Cluster 1 experiences as "encountering God," and for females that holds for Cluster 2 experiences as well. Women in this age group are beginning to claim more relevance for their experiences than their male peers, although levels of positive valuing and trust are comparable. Both genders consider Cluster 1 experiences more trustworthy than those in Cluster 2.

As a group, these young adults are considerably less likely than their juniors to offer a physiological explanation for the experiences being investigated (especially Cluster 2). They are particularly less likely to see Cluster 1 experiences as illusion (3.13 for youth, 2.14 for young adults where 2.= "disagree" and 3.= "don't know).

In terms of beliefs about "the divine" which may undergird their understandings, young adults have two overwhelming favorites: "harmony with nature" and "creative force," coming in about equal at 60 percent. These are same two which the population as a whole favors (at 37% and 52%); the young adults, like raised Unitarian Universalists (which many of them are) rate "harmony with nature" as high as "creative force." "Highest potential" was a male gender preference -- 42 percent of the males and none of the women selected it (one of several items giving the impression that the males in this age group are somewhat more confident and hopeful than their female peers). No other alternative received more than two votes. Unlike their juniors, only three of the 22 young adults responded with "don/t know/uncertain." For a group which appears diverse and individualistic and come from a wide spectrum of places on their life journeys, there is surprising unanimity about theological concepts.

Young adults agree much more than their juniors with the process/relational model supported by 83 percent of the sample population. Half conceive God as "a real power which is a part of all things," and about 60 percent mention the "interconnected web." The two together account for 70 percent of the women and 80 percent of the men. A third of both genders list "A human creation which functions to reinforce a society's ideals," while a third of the males (but no women -- again different from their juniors) chose "a hypothetical ideal."

These young adults are clearly already a part of the larger community, and contributing their surprisingly united voice to the evolving theological dialogue. Few are unsure about what they believe. The women, even more than the men, showed significant changes from the pattern of their juniors.

<u>Younger Mid-lifers</u>

In age range (35-50), this group parallels fairly closely the generation popularly called "boomer." As the first age group to include clergy (about one-third of the women and 40% of the men), the picture becomes more complicated. For most measures, the male clergy do not differ significantly from the male laity. For women in this group, however, clergy identity does impact answers on a number of items.

While experience levels tend to be high for this age group on most measures, there are some interesting variations. The only statistically valid correlation of variance on experiences of "oneness/harmony" was for clergywomen, most of the variance accounted for by the younger mid-life group. But this age group, both male and female, is low in frequency on experiences of "light/joy." The women remain steady with their young adult sisters, while the males drop by .6 from the young adults to the lowest mean score on this item, despite a 40 percent clergy presence in this age-group sample. Experiences of intuitive certainty and "presence" remain steady, with little gender variation. While clergy are four times as likely to have had a "presence" experience

at some time, mean score variance (averaged for frequency) does not quite reach significance. "Voice" and "vision" experiences rise for women in this age group, but changes little for men.

Frequency of prayer/meditation remains similar to the young adult group (if clergy influence is removed, it may actually be lower). Understanding of prayer/meditation shifts, however. Both genders are modestly more likely to see "communion with God" as a purpose for prayer/meditation. For men, this age has the highest level of agreement (lay and clergy), as it does for female clergy (who agree to the level of 4.8 on a 5.0 scale). In fact, removing the clergy influence leaves lay women at approximately the same level of agreement as their young adult sisters.

"Intercession for others" as a purpose for prayer/meditation received more agreement by both lay and clergy women, with little difference between them. The variance on this item was between genders. Where the young adult men and women answered similarly, women and men 36-50 have a gap of 1.1 points between them; women are inclined to agree, while men are inclined to disagree. This difference may reflect the experience of women with child-rearing. Several female informants told me that, even though intellectually they did not believe in a God who would intercede directly to heal or help those they loved, when someone they cared about was hurting their "hearts cried out" spontaneously to the Divine.

Influence of reason upon religious convictions continues to climb, but now men are beginning to report significantly more influence of reason upon their beliefs than women do. "Reading and study" also becomes more important.

How do the younger mid-lifers tend to understand their experiences? As a group, they are more likely than younger people to understand the studied experiences as "encountering God," and this trend is especially marked for women (clergy women most of all 4.3 on a 5.0 scale). Laity of both genders and male clergy are consistent. The female clergy also come in highest in

seeing their experiences as "real interconnectedness" (4.6). Without the clergy, women remain similar to their young adult sisters, but males of this group report experiencing more interconnectedness than do younger males. Both genders are less apt to be frightened by their experiences than younger participants in the study.

In terms of valuing, women in this age group are least likely to consider Cluster 1 experiences "irrelevant," while the males remain consistent with other age groups. For Cluster 2, the gender gap closes somewhat, as the women's curve flattens in the middle and the male pattern develops a modest parallel curve. Both lay and clergy women in this group consider the experiences more "trustworthy" and of more positive value than do those at any other age, while the males again remain consistent, even dropping slightly, on "trustworthy" and rise more modestly than the women on considering the experiences positive. The males discriminate more sharply between "positive value" and trustworthiness, so that a large gender gap opens for this age cohort (and only this age) on the trustworthiness questions. Males are less like to trust, perhaps because in this generation men significantly more than women were exposed to the drug culture in their formative years. Along the same lines, there is a rise in the tendency to interpret the experiences as illusion or "physiological accident" over the age-groups on either side (it would be interesting to do a gender check on these responses).

What convictions about the divine underlie the understandings of this age group? The first-ranked discription of the divine as "creative force" remains popular at about the same level as for the young adults, except that a gender gap begins to open -- women agreeing more than men (63%-57%). A third of both genders chose "harmony with nature," significantly less than the young adults. A reversal appears in contrast with the young adult group: it is women who like the "highest potential" answer (29% of them), while a similar proportion of the men chose "unknowable power" (chosen twice as often by clergy as by the population at large). A question

arises concerning the interaction of age, raised UU identity, and clergy identity on attitudes towards "harmony with nature" as a description for the divine. Of the clergy not raised Unitarian Universalist, only 10 percent support this description; among the third of the clergy who were raised in this tradition 49 percent agree. There are neither large enough sample populations nor information available to determine the relationship between these factors.

The 36-50 age group stands out as the only group to choose one of the "conception of God" alternatives in significant numbers: God as "a 'being' with whom one can experience relationship" was chosen by 42 percent of the women and 28 percent of the men. The two "consensual" answers continue to rise. "A real power which is a part of all things" jumps to 67 percent for women, and more modestly to 59 percent for males. The "interconnected web" model remains at peak level (79%) for women, and rises modestly to 72 percent for men. A "human creation . . . to reinforce a society's ideal" remains similar to young adults, with a larger gender gap opening (men up to 38%). On the other hand, "hypothetical ideal" does not appeal to many mid-lifers of either gender (a change for males). As for the consensual model combining "real power. . . part of all things" and "interconnected web," 87 percent of this age group agrees, with no gender difference.

Contrary to expectation, the younger mid-life group is notable for a significant gender gap on a number of items. The difference is more marked for the clergy. Since women have a bell curve crossed by a straighter line for males on quite a few items, the net result is an increase in the distance between the scores for women and those for men for this middle age group. The discussion of generational cohorts in the next chapter may offer some grounds for understanding these differences.

Older Mid-lifers

Experientially, older mid-lifers (51-65) resemble the younger mid-lifers more than they resemble any other group. On frequency of experiences of intuitive certainty, oneness/harmony, and "presence" they are consistent with the younger mid-lifers. However, on the other three types of experiences this group reports a higher incidence of frequency than do the next-youngest group. For "voice" and "vision," this is the peak age for frequency, most strikingly so for women. Both males and females in this group report more frequent feelings of light/joy than the next-younger group, markedly surpassed only by the female youth. It is possible that the high representation of clergy in this sample influences these patterns, although as a whole, clergy report similar frequencies for these experiences to their lay peers. On the other hand, clergy did report a higher frequency of feeling "comforted" than did the laity, which no doubt influences the high mean score of this age group on that item. Frequency of fear feelings continues to drop, while the influence of reason upon convictions continues to rise.

Informants in the 51-65 age group interpret their Cluster 1 experiences as "encountering God" with a similar degree of agreement to their next-younger counterparts, except in the case of clergywomen, for whom agreement drops somewhat. For Cluster 2, however, there is a modest rise in agreement for both genders, consonent with the finding that this group is more prone to voice and vision experiences than other groups. The gender difference in the frequency of the experiences is also consonent with a continuing .7 gender gap in degree of agreement with this interpretation. As illustrated in Chapter 2, those who have these experiences are more likely to interpret them as having theological meaning than those who do not. On the other hand, agreement with understanding the experiences as "real interconnectedness" remains high for both genders, not changing significantly for the group overall.

Agreement that the experiences are not irrelevant holds steady for men, and for women concerning Cluster 1 experiences. However, for their high-frequency-occurring Cluster 2 experiences, these women are not as certain of relevancy as their younger mid-life sisters. Also for women, there is a small drop in agreement that the experiences have positive value and are trustworthy, while males of this group close the gender gap by agreeing with these understandings more than do the younger mid-life males. For clergy males in particular, this age group is substantially more trusting of the experiences being investigated than their younger or older peers.

This age group not only reports the highest frequency of several types of experiences, but are also report higher frequency rates for prayer/meditation. This is true for both genders, although more so for women. We saw in Chapter 2 that clergy report a somewhat higher frequency for prayer than laity, and this could account for part (but not all) of this pattern.

For the items so far discussed, men and women have shown more similarity than in the preceding age group. However, in responses to the question about purposes of prayer/meditation a sizable gender difference can be observed. When asked about prayer/meditation as "communion with God," the women agreed (4.0), while the male mean is in the low "don't know" range (at 2.8). This represents one of the widest gender gaps in the study, and is essentially the same for clergy as for the total sample (Graph 2.2 shows us that the gender gap for clergy is significantly greater than for laity, a finding which impacts this age-group sample). The gender gap which appeared in the young mid-lifers on the question of prayer/meditation as "intercession for others" continues at a similar level.

For the women of this age group, "creative force" is a favorite way of describing the divine for themselves -- two-thirds of them agree, while only half their male counterparts do. On the other hand, "harmony with nature" comes in lower in this age group than any other: only 29

percent for women and 20 percent for men. "Highest potential" comes out, in fact, a little ahead, this time more evenly for men and women. A quarter of the women also selected "unknowable power" (second choice of the clergy sample, so probably influenced by the clergy contingent in this group).

There is more gender agreement on the question "I conceive God as. . . " This is the age group in which the process-relational image of God reaches an astonishing level of consensus. 69 percent of both genders agree in conceiving God as "a real power which is a part of all things." Men remain at 69 percent while women drop to 56 percent in choosing the image of the "interdependent web" (unexpected given the overall clergy agreement level of 70%). Combine these two choices, and all but one of the 35 informants in this age group are included! Yet at the same time, they agree more than any other age group with a more humanistic choice : God as "a human creation which functions to reinforce a society's ideals." Among late mid-lifers, more women agree with this choice (44%) and men tie for the highest agreement with the younger mid-lifers at 38 percent.

This intriguing and pivotal generation embraces ambiguity in their theology, and in their struggle to understand and value rather frequent and influential "mystical" experiences. The question which comes to mind is why this generation is so different from the one born immediately before it.

The Elder Generation

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this study are the striking differences between this elder generation and the older mid-lifers just described. A second interesting aspect concerns those attitudes that elders have in common with the youngest group(s) in the study, where both differ from the mid-life generations.

Where the older mid-lifers report the highest overall level of frequency for the experiences studied, the elders report least frequency. Frequency levels are similar to other age groups only for two experiences: "sense of oneness/harmony" and "sudden strong feelings of light/joy."

The remaining four experiences fall into two groups for the elders. On the two measures upon which all other age groups are consistent — "sense of intuitive certainty" and "sense of 'felt' presence," the elders drop significantly. On "intuitive certainty," frequency for elder women drops .5 (for laity) and for men the drop is considerably more: .9 for clergy and 1.5 for laity. Frequencies for "felt presence" are scarcely over half what they are for other groups for both genders, and very few individuals reported having them at all (compared with 70% at least "rarely" in the total study population). On the remaining two measures, "voice" and "vision," the <u>mean</u> frequency of occurrence among elders is at "never" (1.0), compared to 2.5 for women and 2.1 for men among older mid-lifers (again on a five-point scale). While around 45 percent of the total population reports having these experiences at some time, almost none of the elders do.

With such a low rate of frequency, how do the elders react to these experiences? For one thing they have almost never been frightened, although they also report significantly less frequent feelings of comfort as well — reactions are less emotional over all (in contrast to the youth). Elder women are much more likely than their mid-life sisters to consider these experiences irrelevant. For Cluster 2 experiences, women are substantially more in agreement that these are irrelevant than are the males, for whom this measure remains steady across the generations. For Cluster 1 experiences, elder men and women concur in their opinions. There is also gender concurrence in according the experiences less value than the mid-lifers, and less trust than any group except female youth.

How do the elders understand these experiences, especially those they have not had? Both genders tend to report that they do not know or disagree that these experiences can be understood as "encountering God," although, rather surprisingly, this disagreement is weaker for the Cluster 2 experiences which so few of them have had (2.8 where 3.0 is "don/t know"). For women, this is a major downward shift in opinion for both clusters; for men, it is a major downward shift for Cluster 1, but not so significantly so for Cluster 2. The male clergy are more open to this option for Cluster 1 than the laity (3.2 rather than 2.2), even though they do not report frequent experiences. Elders are less likely to consider Cluster 1 experiences to be physiologically-based than are any group except the older mid-lifers, but they are most likely of any group except the youth to understand Cluster 2 experiences this way. They are also the most likely to consider Cluster 2 experiences to be "illusion," and second only to youth in understanding Cluster 1 experiences as illusion.

The elders, surprisingly, are similar to mid-lifers in their level of agreement that both groups of experiences can be understood as "real interconnectedness." They agree with this understanding more than do the youth, or the young adult males, yet report strikingly lower frequency of occurrences for these experiences than any other group. Given that "non-experiencers" as a whole have a mean of 2.8 on this measure for Cluster 2 experiences, the elder's mean score of 3.7 is hard to explain, as is the fact that the male elders agree with this interpretation more than any other group of males.

In addition to reporting lower frequency (or absence) of the experiences being studied, elders also report a lower frequency of prayer/meditation — a drop of .8 for women and 1.0 for men (on a four-point scale) from the older mid-lifers. For men, more so than women, frequency is lower than any other group. Within this age cohort, however, women do report substantially

higher frequency of prayer/meditation than do men, one of the few gender differences in this age group. In terms of agreed-upon purposes for prayer/meditation, the gender gap of the mid-lifers closes; elder women plunge to the level of the men in disagreeing that purposes of prayer are "communion with God" and "intercession for others." Elder male clergymen, in fact, come in (at 1.7) a full point below the laity of both genders on prayer/meditation as "intercession for others."

In their descriptions of the divine, women and men share a high level of agreement with "creative force" (58% and 50%), the total population's favorite. Women, more than men, also support the second-place choice of the total group: "harmony with nature" (50% to 33%). But a third of the women and half that many men chose "don't know/uncertain," the only group other than the youth to select this option in significant numbers.

In response to the question, "I conceive God as —," far fewer of the elders than mid-lifers agreed that "God" is "a real power which is a part of all things" (42% for women, and 50% for men). More of the women (75% to 58%) agreed with the model of God as the "interconnected web." Oddly, a third of the men (but none of the women) selected "a 'being' with whom one can experience relationship." Perhaps these are men who do not choose to use the term for themselves because they associate the word "God" with this conception in the traditional sense? A third of the men and 42 percent of the women also selected "a human creation which functions to reinforce a society's ideals (higher for women in this age group). A quarter of this age group (regardless of gender) selected the option of "hypothetical ideal" popular with youth but of little interest to mid-lifers. In terms of the process-relational "consensual model" previously discussed, 92 percent of the women (all but one) but only 75 percent of the men chose at least one of the first two conceptions.

Given the difference in reported frequency of the studied experiences, it was surprising to find that elders did not differ more in theological positions. Nor did they differ in agreement that these experiences represented "real interconnectedness," despite the fact that they also tended to suspect the experiences (especially Cluster 2) of being "illusion.

What sets this generation apart, beyond the low frequency of occurrence of certain experiences, is the agreement between genders on measures where there is a greater gender gap among mid-lifers. This includes measures of relevance, value and trustworthiness. In fact, for several informants in this age group, distrust was so high that they indicated discomfort in participating in the study at all, and made it clear they were not available for interviewing. The elders are also set apart by the striking difference in many scores between themselves and the next-youngest generation.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Findings from the research project which provides the core of this study support the thesis that differences in frequency and type of subjective experiences, as well as frames for interpreting and valuing such experiences, correlate with generation, in particular with generation interacting with gender. As predicted, both reported frequency and valuing of such phenomena were lowest for the eldest generation. Among the two mid-life generations, frequency and valuing were generally higher than for elders. However, while the prediction that higher frequency would be found together with lower valuing held true for the youth, young adults in this study are already showing patterns moving in the direction of the mid-life adult population, and in fact fit in surprisingly well with the growing theological "consensus" pointed up by this study. It does appear that youth have little framework in which to evaluate or understand their experiences, and react to them more on an emotional level than do the older age cohorts. Most

elders, on the other hand, depend most heavily upon reason for their assessments of both religious beliefs and experiences, and report less emotional response than the younger groups.

Among the more surprising findings was the responses of the elders to theological questions. They did not choose strictly humanistic understandings of the Divine as often as expected. However, it is possible that some of the traditional God conceptions were chosen with the belief that this is what most people mean by God (and, given this definition, the subjects do not believe in such a being). The elders also reported strong understandings of the subject experiences as "real interconnectedness," even when they had not personally experienced these phenomena and considered them rather likely to be illusion. While some of the elders were uneasy even discussing a subject such as "mystical experience," others respected such experiences in the lives of others, and felt as if they had missed something in their own lives.

The similarities and differences between elders and youth are intriguing. Upon closer examination, the apparent "similarities" have such different causes that one can argue they have little true relevance. However, this is a good object lesson in the importance of looking beyond behavior or surface beliefs if one is to develop insight into the faith of others. Getting beyond such surface similarities to real life experience and the motivations of the heart is an important reason for studies such as this one.

On the other hand, this study has brought to light an unexpected degree of similarity in core theology which to a large degree transcends generation. The image of the "interconnected web" both expresses and has shaped an evolving consensual cosmology. Elder generation humanists have absorbed this sense of the nature of the cosmos more than have youth, but it is strongest among mid-lifers. In particular, young mid-life female clergy in this study embody this evolving perspective in their convictions, experiences and in the way they live their lives.

CHAPTER 4

Context for Understanding the Data

In order to provide some context within which to look at the findings of the original research described in the last two chapters, sources in three areas were consulted. For the larger context of contemporary American culture, a sociological model of generational trends will be discussed in relationship to the research population. Historical context within the Unitarian Universalist tradition is provided by a brief look at material reflecting past shifts in theological perspectives, using primary source data where possible. The third section of this chapter examines contemporary written materials which are influencing evolving denominational identity

Generational Cohorts in U.S. Culture - Sociological Model

A number of historians and sociologists have offered models for understanding the evolution of American culture. Since there is not space to be comprehensive in this section, a single model has been selected to provide an example of how a such larger contextual setting can contribute to understanding the findings in the preceding two chapters. The generational descriptions which follow are drawn from the work of William Strauss and Neil Howe. Their findings are reported in a book entitled The Generations, a sociological study of American generations from the founding of this country to the present.

The Strauss and Howe study presents a model of a four-generation cycle, with only one aberration in the thirteen generations studied. For the present, the generation born before 1925 is called the GI generation, and is a "civic" type -- shaped in rising adulthood by the events of depression and World War II. The generation born from 1925 to 1942 is called the "Silent" generation, and is an "adaptive" type. The third generation, born from 1943 to 1960, is given its common name -- the "Boom" generation. In terms of the study's larger classifications, it is an

"Idealist" generation, shaped in youth by a spiritual awakening within the culture — the consciousness revolution of the 60s and 70s. Finally, at least for our purposes, those born from 1961 to 1981, the thirteenth generation born in this country, are a "Reactive" generation.[1]

The study considers Civic and Idealist generations dominant. Certainly in our era, that seems to be the case. For example, the Presidency has recently passed from GI to Boom generation without a single "Silent generation" representative.[2] In terms of recent trends in Unitarian Universalism as well, a struggle between values affirmed by GI and Boom generations appears to hold center stage, with Silent generation representatives contributing their Adaptive role of trying to help us integrate the two points of view

A disclaimer is in order here. Clearly not all members of a generational cohort (as defined by Strauss and Howe) embody typical values equally. Personality type, sub-culture and family of origin experience can result in Boomers with values more similar to their GI parents than most. If Civic eras tend to produce more people who excel in science and engineering, a Boomer engineer might have more sympathy than others of his generation with some of the values of the older generation. And vice versa. But Strauss and Howe contend that the patterns within each generation are strong enough to be statistically significant, and to shape our cultural and religious institutions.

The Elders

So what are the typical characteristics and values of the GI generation? Born into an era of hopefulness and a new century, these young people were not discouraged by the depression the way their elders were. Instead, the cultural myth which shapes them is that they were able to survive and overcome it, and carry on to win a war. Of the young men who fought in World War II, 97

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[1] Strauss and Howe, 230, 296.
[2] Strauss and Howe, 279.

percent came through without serious injury -- very different from Vietnam.[3] For them, it was a decisive coming-of-age -- a test of courage, responsibility, and teamwork. A time when "uncommon valor was a common virtue."[4]

Teamwork was, in fact, a characteristic of that generation. As children, these were the first Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and Campfire Girls. Cooperation, kindness and friendliness were inculcated young. For most, there was an instinctive tendency to abide by the will of the community -- a strong collectivist reflex. George Bush, a representative of that generation, spoke of community as "a beautiful word with a big meaning."[5]

This generation has leaned strongly toward left-brained problem-solving.   They produced 99 Nobel Laureates -- two-thirds of all that have been awarded to citizens of our country.[6] Ayn Rand saw the moon-landing as the "embodied concretization of a single human faculty: rationality."[7] It was the time when B. F. Skinner's "technology of behavior" -- his experiments in raising his children in "black boxes" with reward and punishment feedback -- caught the popular imagination.[8]

This was a generation which excelled at overcoming crisis. The GIs "can do" attitude was both the source and the product of the many social circumstances which improved during their lifetimes. Six out of seven of them are better off than their parents. There were dramatic improvements in health and in education. Home ownership increased by 50 percent. In a recent survey, 47 percent of this generation, now 69 and up, claim that they almost never worry about finances.[9]

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[3] Strauss and Howe, 272.
[4] Strauss and Howe, 261.
[5] Strauss and Howe, 265.
[6] Strauss and Howe, 268.
[7] Strauss and Howe, 263.
[8] Strauss and Howe, 264.
[9] Strauss and Howe, 368.

These accomplishments were products of a powerful work ethic. For many, the vision was to be always producing more, doing more, being more. Even as seniors, many of them are still accomplishing much to influence the shape of society.

In an optimistic culture which believed in progress, the place of religion declined in importance. A recent poll of Harvard graduates from the class of 1940 showed that 88 percent considered themselves happy, but 41 percent were "not religious at all. [10] As one writer of the era comments: "Despair comes hard to us, for it was unfamiliar in our growing"[11] The indigenous culture in many homes for seniors in our day is seen by one sociologist as one that "admits neither to loneliness nor to suffering" [12]

How do these generational cohort characteristics fit the data uncovered by this study concerning generational differences among Unitarian Universalist? The most obvious fit is in the GI orientation to left-brain problem-solving. The elders in the study depended upon reason as a source of their convictions more than any other group. They also experienced (or admitted to experiencing) less fear than any other group, as one might expect from the generational model Strauss and Howe propose.

The elders in this study are much less likely to have had (or be aware of having) four of the six types of experiences which were examined. Even when they do report these experiences, they are less likely to find them relevant. In fact, several informants made it clear that even discussing the content of the study questionnaire made them uncomfortable. Their expressions of faith more often take the form of social action to change the outer world, using skills for teamwork common to their generation in the population at large. The traditional Unitarian phrase, "onward and upward forever," may be cast into doubt, but it is not quite discarded by the current elders. The personal

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[10] Strauss and Howe, 269.
[11] Strauss and Howe, 266.
[12] Strauss and Howe, 275.

life stories of a number of these elders illustrate the resistance to despair pointed out by Strauss and Howe. For mid-lifers in this study, the experiences referred to as Cluster 2 ("felt" presence, voice, vision) often happened at points of deep despair or discouragement in their lives, so perhaps this is one reason why elders are unlikely to report them.

In some ways, however, elder Unitarian Universalists do not fit this model. A primary difference is their marked individualism in a generation known for communal thinking. This is one example of how the historical culture of a faith tradition can interact with the contemporary generational culture of a society at large.

Older Mid-lifers

According to Strauss and Howe's model, Americans presently aged 52 to 69 are an adaptive generation, called by a number of commentators the "Silent" generation. The boundaries of this generation are set primarily by the events in the lives of those who came before and after.

One historian commented upon their early years: "Never had American youth been so withdrawn, cautious, unimaginative, indifferent, unadventurous -- and silent."[13] Another commentator recalls that "Most of us kept quiet, attempting not to call attention to ourselves."[14] As a group, they were cooperative and conforming young people who matured into the "consummate helpmate generation."[15] In their young years, they were a protected generation, and exhibited the lowest rates for this century "for almost every social pathology of youth."[16] School discipline problems were few; usually no more serious than cutting in line or chewing gum Economic prosperity has come easier to them than to other generations, because of the groundwork laid by their elders.

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[13] Strauss and Howe, 279.
[14] Strauss and Howe, 286.
[15] Strauss and Howe, 279.
[16] Strauss and Howe, 281.

For many of these people who are now in their later mid-life years, the Peace Corps is a generational bond -- more Harvard graduates of the class of 1964 headed for the Peace Corps than any other type of employment.[17] This generation tended to be serious youth who admired and identified with the values of the generation ahead of them, until their own version of the "consciousness revolution" hit them in the 1970s. After this point, as a group they felt more identification with the Boom generation coming after them, many of them "mentoring" the Boom "awakening" into creative places they themselves could envision but not quite reach.

This generation retained their elders' social consciousness, and appealed for change through "a self-conscious humanity and tender social conscience" portrayed in songs like "We shall overcome."[18] These usually non-violent, sensitive visionaries laid the groundwork for the civil rights movement and other social changes made more dramatically visible and confrontive as the next generation arrived on the scene. Two of their most influential figures were Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King. In fact, almost all the leaders of the civil rights movement came from their ranks.[19] They sang of hammering out justice, if they only "had a hammer." That hammer was perceived by many of them as being in the hands of their dominant elders, who held the power in society.

Members of the Silent generation tend towards moral relativism, not so much having ready-made answers as "a honed capacity to ask and to listen" which allowed them to bridge gaps, yet often made them uncertain parents.[20] This was the generation which began to be interested in participation and process over authority and results. They entered "helping" professions in record numbers. Yet their uncertainty has been described as stemming from lack of a cohesive core.

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[17] Strauss and Howe, 281.
[18] Strauss and Howe, 282.
[19] Strauss and Howe, 285.
[20] Strauss and Howe, 282.

Some have expressed the concern that, rather than contributing to the shaping of their culture, they have facilitated its "unraveling."[21]

Marrying and having children younger than any other generation in this century, the "silent" college-educated women were the only ones to have more children than those of their generation who were not college-educated. While the males reached higher educational levels than their elders, women in this generation showed no gain. In fact, there were distinct losses, as these women almost disappeared from entry-level positions in engineering, architecture, and other fields the previous generation of women had begun to enter in larger numbers during the period of World War II. Yet twenty years later, almost all prominent feminists in this country came out of this generation.[22]

The sexual revolution in the culture at large hit them at an awkward age, causing a jump in the rates of mid-life crises and divorce. In Gail Sheehy's language, "merger selves" were rejected in favor of "seeker selves."[23] Their conformity fragmented as women in large numbers began to see themselves as "trapped at home," and were drawn to feminism, while men attempted to integrate values from the generations on either side of them into a picture of masculinity which made sense.[24] It is authors of this generation who have coined concepts like "passages" and "turning points," as they struggled to find, in the dramatic changes in their own lives, inner meaning with which their elders were rarely concerned. As one commentator put it in the late 1960s, "I think that the best of my generation . . . have reversed the customary rules of the game and have grown more radical as they have gotten older -- a disconcerting but healthy sign."[25]

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[21] Strauss and Howe, 283.
[22] Strauss and Howe, 284.
[23] Strauss and Howe, 288.
[24] Strauss and Howe, 281.
[25] Strauss and Howe, 289.

Strauss and Howe see this generation as having, at a deep level, a "wounded collective ego."[26] They tended to be apologetic children, resigned young adults, and belatedly rebellious mid-lifers who are often fighting against quiet despair, and fear that they are irrelevant.[27]

Little was discussed about this generation in terms of spirituality. But they have tended to be bridge-builders interested in the lives of real people rather than heroes or ideals. They have encouraged communication between people and defused conflicts. Many have struggled to strike a balance, like Jim Henson of Muppet fame, "between the sacred and the silly."[28]

The older mid-lifers in this study, mostly in the Silent generation as defined in the model under discussion here, are pivotal to the changing patterns within the Unitarian Universalist tradition. The mid-life rebellion Strauss and Howe discuss strongly influenced this generation of Unitarian Universalists hard. In greater numbers than in the society at large, they followed their juniors into sexual revolution, consciousness-raising and sex-role changes. Divorce rates were high. Standards for clergy sexual misconduct were lax, and rarely enforced. This rebellion against societal norms still identifies some Unitarian Universalist groups. The denomination at large, however, has in the past few years instituted standards of sexual ethics which result in expulsion from Fellowship for many of the same behaviors commonly practiced by male clergy two decades ago.

Unitarian Universalists were at the forefront of the Silent-led early civil rights movement. James Reeb, one of our few contemporary martyrs and a representative of this generation, died at Selma in 1965.[29] The new generation reaching adulthood sang Silent-composed songs, "We shall overcome" in particular, at almost all church youth gatherings.

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[26] Strauss and Howe, 292.
[27] Strauss and Howe, 292.
[28] Strauss and Howe, 293.
[29] Unitarian Universalist Association, To Bear Witness: Unitarian Universalists, Selma to Montgomery (Boston: UUA, 1965).

Unitarian Universalist institutions have been shaped by the Silent interest in participation and process, although in the past few years there has been interested in more leadership and less facilitatorship on the part of the clergy. They have also been changed significantly by the rise in Feminism and the issues this has brought forward. More than any other generation in this study, older mid-lifers express ambiguity in their theology, embracing simultaneously positions about the nature of God which others tend to consider contradictory. As the Generations study points out, they tend to be inclusive of the points of view of both the generation elder to them and the generation which follows them, even when these points of view are contradictory.

This model, with its pattern of Silent generation mid-life transformation, may help to explain the dramatic shift in emotional experience and spiritual understanding which the study data portrays. Where the GI generation found despair "comes hard," many in the next generation threw off their "silent despair" in their mid-years. This is especially true for Unitarian Universalist women, who, even more than women in the culture at large, embraced Feminism, often left their too-early marriages, and broke the constraints of their early-conditioned "merger selves" to claim their own reality. That reality includes the highest frequency in this study of experiences often self-labeled "mystical." The pattern is even more marked for clergywomen, several of whom, when interviewed, associated these experiences with moments when, out of their very despair or discouragement, they reached to something "beyond themselves" for support. In more than a few cases, it seems quite possible that these women would not have accomplished the difficult transitions which enabled them to claim their calling without this source of support.

Younger Mid-lifers

The Boom generation, in the Strauss and Howe model covering current ages 34 to 51, is a close age-parallel with the younger mid-lifers in this current study. According to Strauss and Howe, GI and Silent parents expected their children "to be cheerful builders who would 'lay out

blight-proof, smog-free cities, enrich the underdeveloped world, and no doubt write finis to poverty and war."[30] The prophesies about the Boom generation collapsed in confusion, rage, and social chaos. Dr. Benjamin Spock had told their parents, "we need idealistic children," in part to help the country resist Communism.[31] This generation was taught by left-brain parents and teachers to question authority, to argue, even by extension to disobey orders which violated personal standards. Their elders were often troubled by the way Boomers chose to put these values into action.

But Strauss and Howe contend that the Boom generation was also the product of a generational pattern centuries old. Cultures have a way of balancing themselves. Outer directed generations follow inner-directed generations. After two generations dominated by action values and left-brain thinking, a swing back to more interior, spiritual values and right-brain thinking is not a novel pattern.[32] Their parents may have provided them with thinking skills and education which prepared the ground, but it was the consciousness revolution of the 60s and 70s which shaped this generation. While some were more caught up in the spirit of the day than others, it touched all of them.

The Boom ethos has been, to quote the Generations study, "a deliberate antithesis to everything GI: spiritualism over science, gratification over patience, negativism over positivism, fractiousness over conformity, rage over friendliness, self over community."[33] Boomers made a priority value of individual conscience, while showing little interest in community. The authors suggest that the consciousness revolution which shaped this generation began as "a revolt against fathers."[34]

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[30] Strauss and Howe, 301.
[31] Strauss and Howe, 308.
[32] Strauss and Howe, 76.
[33] Strauss and Howe, 302.
[34] Strauss and Howe, 302.

Boomers came of age "deriding 'banality, irrelevance, and all the uglinesses which conspire to harm or extinguish the human personality.'"[35] Where many of their GI parents were shaped by perceiving World War II as a victory, Boomers knew the stories which came out later of atrocities and horrors. They read in school the studies of conformity and its role in allowing such horrors to happen. They looked within for solutions to a world which scandalized our ideals.

Their anger shaped action in demonstrations against racism and the draft, but it was not the kind of action their more non-violent, Silent elders had hoped for. Their rage -- incomprehensible to many -- was a rage in defense of the conviction that every person has infinite worth and dignity[36] Where their GI elders had excelled at resolving crises, and their Silent elders tended to be skilled reconcilers and bridge-builders, those in the Boom generation tended to be drawn to fomenting crisis.

According to Strauss and Howe, this generation saw its mission not so much in building society as in "justifying, purifying, even sanctifying it."[37] It still does. As a group, Boomers make better philosophers and preachers than scientists or builders. But they are not united in their ideals. The Pro-Choice battle, for example, is fueled most fervently on both sides by mid-life Boomers. The early cohorts tend to be Pro-Choice, while the later-born Boomers are often ardently anti-choice.

Boomers tend to measure themselves subjectively, in terms of inner strength, rather than outer accomplishments. In religious terms, to quote psychologist Erik Erikson, their journey has been a "search for resacralization" of a secularized world.[38] Although many have chosen to practice an interior, private form of spirituality, this generation has returned to church in record numbers in the past ten years or so. But their choice of religious orientation differs from their elders. On the one

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[35] Strauss and Howe, 299.
[36] Strauss and Howe, 303.
[37] Strauss and Howe, 301.
[38] Strauss and Howe, 299.

hand, they are fueling the growth of evangelical Christian groups. But on the other hand, they are the main followers of New Age religions, and account for most of the Muslims (now a larger number than Episcopalians in this country), Buddhists and other faiths not traditional to American culture. Seventy percent of them believe in psychic phenomena, where only half their elders do.[39]

As with the older mid-lifers, Unitarian Universalists of this generation joined the Boomer consciousness revolution with great enthusiasm. Unitarian Universalist youth were raised permissively somewhat before this tendency hit the culture at large. In the 1960s, they were involved in both drugs and free sexual expression in large numbers, often at church events. A the same time, they were also participating in large numbers in the civil rights movement and protests against the Vietnam war.

By the end of the decade, the high-school age Liberal Religious Youth organization had been expelled from the church, because it was felt by adults to be totally out of control. Yet there was a great deal of intensity and idealism within the Unitarian youth movement, as the youth hymn of that era portrays. The hymn declared, "We would be one," and was a pledge to "that high cause of greater understanding of who we are, and what is us is true." It expressed commitment to service, building a better world and searching for meaning "which binds our hearts" and provides direction for action.[40]

As mid-life Boomers return to the church in greater numbers, they bring a chastened idealism with them. As youth, males more than females experimented with drugs, and males (not females) faced the decisions the institution of the draft put before them. Now as mid-lifers, their generational experience in the larger culture differs more by generation than might be expected.

The women, especially those who have entered the clergy, experience more oneness and harmony than their male peers, and are more likely to attribute relevance, value and trustworthiness

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[39] Strauss and Howe, 307.
[40] Unitarian Universalist Asso. Singing the Living Tradition (Boston: UUA, 1993), 318 (adapted).

to their experiences of the types studied. It is particularly noteworthy that, among the clergy raised Unitarian Universalist (many of them in this generation), women are strikingly more likely to consider "communion with God" a purpose for prayer. The Boomer cohort within the culture at large has brought the genders closer together in terms of economic and vocational opportunities, but within Unitarian Universalist circles, at least, there are some striking gender differences in attitudes and understandings (as brought out in this study).

These women are the first to come to a sense of true equality with males at a young age. They have more confidence than their older sisters in proclaiming the value of their own experience. For many of these younger women, less struggle was necessary in order to claim their own reality. This may account for a decline in frequency of some of the experiences studied, which for older mid-life women occurred most often in moments of great discouragement.

Youth and Young Adults

Both the younger groups in this study fit into one of the generational cohorts as identified by the Strauss and Howe model. Called simply the "Thirteenth Generation," (with consciousness of its Halloweenish overtones) these young people were born into a world which felt more out-of-control and less optimistic than that in which the other generations of our time grew up in.[41] Many of them have come of age with catastrophic expectations concerning the future of our planet. Commentators have expressed much concern that they are another "lost" generation, seeing them as "frenetic, physical, slippery . . . shocking on the outside, unknowable on the inside."[42] Suicide rates among teens in this generation are at an all-time high, and twice as many minors are murdered than a generation ago.[43] School children bring over a hundred thousand guns, and six times as many knives, into the classroom each day.

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[41] Strauss and Howe, 317.
[42] Strauss and Howe, 319.
[43] Strauss and Howe, 326.

Going through childhood during the worst of the bomb-scare years and coming of age in the midst of ecological crisis, these young people have also faced more personal forms of discouragement. Their economic outlook, no matter how hard they try to succeed, is poorer than it was for the three generations ahead of them. They grew up in an era less friendly to children, as their late Silent and early Boom parents gave more attention to self-realization and less to parenting than their own parents had, and families were much more fragmented. As Strauss and Howe explain, "Thirteeners knew that where Boomers had been once worth the parental sacrifice of prolonging an unhappy marriage, they were not."[44] Many were raised permissively, exposed young by television to a level of sophistication no previous generation of children had access to, including violence, casual sexuality, and an overload of conflicting values and norms. Unlike their immediate elders, who often prolonged their "adolescence" into the 20s, many of these young people grew up fast.

Yet the young people themselves often reveal a tough core of self-esteem that the society's skepticism has not shaken. They see themselves as "pragmatic, quick, sharp-eyed, able to step outside themselves to understand the game of life as it really gets played."[45] They are skeptical of the Boomers' idealism. Many agree that "the sexual revolution is over, and everybody lost."[46] In a culture where youth has been traditionally associated with idealism, today's cynics tend to be those under thirty, half of whom surprised researchers by claiming this label.[47]

These young people are, according to the authors, in many ways the opposite of the Silent generation. Their Silent parents raised many of them with a lack of clear boundaries and an ambiguity about values which the youth found confusing. Where the Silent were overprotected as children, reaching adulthood as the culture loosened up, this group experienced the opposite.

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[44] Strauss and Howe, 329.
[45] Strauss and Howe, 320.
[46] Strauss and Howe, 322.
[47] Strauss and Howe, 328.

Another significant difference is that "where the Silent grew up with a childlike awe of powerful elders, Thirteeners have acquired an adultlike fatalism about the weakness and uncertainty of elders -- and question their ability to protect the young from future danger."[48] Silents came of age in a rather simple culture, to which many of them found ways to add depth and subtlety; Thirteeners grew up bombarded by "information overload" and struggle to cut through to what really matters.

Of all the generational cohorts described by Strauss and Howe, this one least resembles the subject population of this study. Yet in their own way the youth and young adults of this study show a reaction pattern to the generation which preceded them. They tend to be skeptical about substance abuse, and are somewhat less "promiscuous" than their Boomer predecessors within the church community. They have shown a strong sense of responsibility for the shaping of their own organizations in dialog with older members of their churches. Both youth and young adults take part in debates at annual assemblies which shape church positions and policies. The theological positions on the nature of God preferred by the young adult group are those coming to the fore in the denomination at large, partly as a result of their voices.

Perhaps one reason the cynicism described as endemic to Thirteeners does not show up strongly in these sample populations is that the more cynical of their generation have not chosen to remain involved in religious community. Another reason is that, for those of the youth and young adults who grew up Unitarian Universalist, the church provided them with ways to fight their fears of a world out of control. My own daughter, for example, took part in a walk for the Nuclear Freeze movement when she was eight years old, and won a prize for contributions collected.

There are indications of wider cultural influence, however. For one thing, these groups are less likely than mid-lifers to find relevance, positive value and trustworthiness in their encounters

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[48] Strauss and Howe, 322.

with the experiences studied. They are also considerably more likely to experience fear. They feel less "real interconnectedness" (especially the young men), and the youth are more likely to say they "don't know" or are "uncertain" about how to describe the divine. Even the young adult positive ascription of "harmony with nature" to the divine does have some relevant connection with their generation's tendency towards concreteness and physicality. But on the whole, the population of young people studied in this project fit the Strauss/Howe model much less closely than did the older age groups. This is true not just of the youth population, which may be atypical, but of the young adult group as well.

<center>Diverse Perspectives in Unitarian Universalist History</center>

The diversity of subjective religious experience, and understandings of that experience, among Unitarian Universalists can be constructively considered from within a historical as well as a sociological context. Within these traditions, there are exemplars and mentors for the various points of view towards which the different generations of Unitarian Universalists lean in the present. There are, in fact, certain points in the tradition's history when a similar tension existed between an emphasis upon rationality and a more experiential, intuitive faith. The "Unitarian Controversy" in the early nineteenth century between more establishment Unitarians, represented by William Ellery Channing, and the Transcendentalists is a case in point. The remainder of this section gives some examples the diversity of faith perspectives within the history of Unitarianism and Universalism, and reviews several twentieth-century attempts to integrate rationality and "mysticism."

Rationality

On the Unitarian side of the tradition, rationality has been a hallmark of the tradition in this country since its inception. At that time, this emphasis provided a much needed balance to the temper of the times as the "great awakening" swept up the country into an emotional religious

fervor. Later, the Free Religion movement and then Humanism picked up the rational threads and separated them even farther from the Christian faith tradition.

William Ellery Channing. Representing the rational side of the argument during the Unitarian Controversy was the venerable William Ellery Channing, an eloquent writer whose works were read around the world. Channing, often considered the father of American Unitarianism, made frequent remarks rejecting or discounting "mysticism." To Channing, mysticism meant discounting the value of the human:

> We must believe in man's (sic) agency as truly as in the Divine, in his freedom as truly as in his dependence, in his individual being as truly as in the great doctrine of his living in God. Just as far as the desire of exalting the Divinity obscures these conceptions, our religion is sublimated into mysticism or degraded into servility. In the Oriental world . . . Perfection has been thought to lie in self-oblivion, in losing one's self in the Divinity, in establishing exclusive communion with God. The mystic worshipper fled from society to wildernesses, where not even nature's beauty might divert the soul from the Unseen. Living on root, sleeping on the rocky floor of his cave, he hoped to absorb himself in the One and the Infinite. The more the consciousness of the individual was lost, and the more the will and the intellect became passive or yielded to the universal soul, the more perfect seemed the piety.[49]

Channing offered this advice to young preachers: "It is a common error that, to avoid dullness . . . the preacher can find more effectual means than the clear expression of simple truth. Accordingly, some have recourse to crude novelties; some to mysticism, as if truth, to be imposing, must be enthroned in clouds . . . ."[50] He saw Unitarianism as a rational and active faith, opposed to both passion and passivity.

For Channing, mysticism was the province of ascetics who sought loss of individual consciousness and passivity of intellect. At other times, he assailed it as an excess of emotional zeal unrestrained by a critical mind and bringing no lasting change in character. Mysticism was clearly for him a word with negative connotations. Yet elsewhere, discussing relationship to God, he declares:

> God unfolds himself (sic) in his works to a kindred mind. It is possible that the brevity of these hints may expose to the truth. I think, however, that every reflecting man will feel that

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[49] William E. Channing, The Works of William E. Channing (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Assoc., 1875), 3.

[50] Channing, 286.

likeness to God must be a principle of sympathy or accordance with his creation; for the creation is a birth and shining forth of the Divine Mind, a work through which his spirit breathes. In proportion as we receive this spirit we possess within ourselves the explanation of that we see. We discern more and more of God in every thing, from the frail flower to the everlasting stars.[51]

This vision of "God in every thing" suggests a softening of boundaries not as alien to mystical thought as some of his words might suggest. Despite his own derision towards the concept of mysticism as he understood it, elsewhere in his writings Channing himself sounds suspiciously like a nature mystic. He writes of the beach near where he grew up:

No spot on earth has helped to form me so much as that beach. There I lifted up my voice in praise amidst the tempest. There, softened by beauty, I poured out my thanksgiving and contrite confessions. There, in reverential sympathy with the mighty power around me, I became conscious of power within . . . . There began a happiness surpassing all worldly pleasures . . . the happiness of communing with the works of God.[52]

Several factors contribute to Channing's disparagement of "mysticism." Unitarianism of that day stood opposed to the excesses of the Great Awakening. Following Channing's lead, it distrusted religious emotions which led only to elevated feelings and no lasting change in character. There was also a class factor involved. Channing frequently associated emotions with the "vulgar" and "ignorant."[53] He himself, during his youth, struggled long and hard to "conquer" his sensual nature, even to the point that he permanently broke his health. There is an explicit dualism between reason and passion of any sort, which are considered in a state of war. Finally, social Darwinism was already making itself felt. Channing speaks of "rude notions" which " have faded before the light of Science."

No one influenced nineteenth century Unitarianism more than Channing. The majority of institutional Unitarian leaders followed his lead in rejecting the sensual, the emotional, and even the mystic.

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[51] Channing, 292.
[52] Channing, 422.
[53] Channing, 222.

<u>The Social Gospel and Humanist Movements</u>. The beginning of the twentieth century saw

Unitarianism, and to some extent Universalism, influenced by all the factors discussed in my class

on Cultural Psychology of Religion as discouraging subjective religious experience. Both

denominations, from their formal beginnings, tended to be more concerned with character and

action for social change than with introspective meditation. The social gospel movement of the

early twentieth century merely reinforced those tendencies. Subjective religious experience of any

sort was often viewed as passive; the charge to liberal religious people was a charge to action.

Also, the rise of science and reductionist psychology tended to discourage formal affirmation of

experiences which might be called "mystical," even by the definition of the Transcendentalists (see

next section).

In 1917, the Universalists constructed a social program at their annual convocation. It

concluded:

> The Universalist Church offers a complete program for completing humanity:
> First. An Economic Order which shall give to every human being an equal share in
> the common gifts of God, and in addition all that he shall earn by his own labor.
> Second. A Social Order in which there shall be equal rights for all, special privilege
> for none, the help of the strong for the weak until the weak become strong.
> Third. A Moral Order in which all human law and action shall be the expression of
> the moral order of the universe.[54]

Being Universalists, however, they retained one goal which Unitarians of the day often forgot

to mention: "Fourth. A Spiritual Order which shall build out of the growing lives of living men

(<u>sic</u>.) the growing temple of the living God."

The most explicit philosophical movement which set itself in opposition to anything which

might be called "mystical experience" was Humanism. In fact, the "Humanist Manifesto,"

published in 1933, stated explicitly:

> In place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his (<u>sic</u>)
> religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative

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[54] Ernest Cassara, ed., <u>Universalism in America</u> (Boston:Unitarian Universalist Assoc, 1971), 253.

effort to promote social well-being. It follows that there will be no uniquely religious emotions and attitudes of the kind hitherto associated with belief in the supernatural.[55]

Within both Unitarian and Universalist churches, a fierce battle was waged between the proponents of Humanism, so defined, and the proponents of Theism. Humanism became the dominant philosophical influence in a number of churches for fifty years or more.

Intuitive Idealism

Both Universalism and Unitarianism have had, from the beginnings of their history, spokespersons for a faith position of intuitive idealism, in some cases outright self-proclaimed mysticism. This has been more persistently the case with Universalism.

Early Universalists. American Universalism sprang up among pietistic, and (at least according to one historian) mystical roots[56]. It's first advocate, Dr. George De Benneville, describes in his autobiography a variety of subjective religious experiences which influences his life and faith, including at least one near-death experience fitting the criteria of modern describers.[57] John Murray considered himself guided by omens. Hosea Ballou, the most influential of the American-born founders, describes an intense emotional relationship with the natural world as his primary religious teacher.

George De Benneville, son of an exiled French noble family, grew up under the care of a branch of the royal family in England (clearly, among Universalists, "mystical" experiences were not considered a "lower class" phenomenon). He was led by a series of visions and what he perceived as a divine voice to embrace Universalism and become a minister. Several of these experiences occurred during lengthy illnesses when he was a young man. He described the most dramatic of these:

> I became sickly of a consumptive disorder occasioned by being greatly concerned for the salvation of souls. I took it so to heart that I believed my happiness would be

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[55] Cassara, 260.

[56] Cassara, 52.

[57] Raymond Moody, Life after Life (New York: Bantam, 1975).

incomplete while one creature remained miserable. My fever increased in such a manner as reduced me almost to a skeleton so that they were obliged to feed me as an infant.

I felt myself die by degrees, and exactly at midnight I was separated from by body and saw the people occupied in watching it according to the custom of the country. Immediately I was drawn up as in a cloud and beheld great wonders where I passed, impossible to be written or expressed. I quickly came to a place which was filled with all sorts of delightful fruit trees, agreeable to behold, and which sent forth such fragrant odors that all the air was filled as with incense. In this place I found that I had two guardians, exceedingly beautiful beyond expression, whose boundless friendship and love seemed to penetrate through all my inward parts.

Then my guardian took me up and reconducted me to the house from whence I came. And discovering my body in the coffin, I was reunited with the same. And coming to myself, I knew my brothers who gave me an account of my being thought dead for 42 hours. To me they seemed as many years.[58]

De Benneville, following his visions, came to America around 1740, where he preached and practiced medicine. He was noted, among many accomplishments, for his friendship with, and practice of medicine among, the Indians of the Pennsylvania area.

Of the three founders of Universalism, Hosea Ballou was the only one born in America. An older contemporary of Channing, he also emphasized the importance of reason in religion. Yet, like many Universalists, his optimistic love sprang from a subjective religious reality which transcended reason, although it was not permitted to discount it. As a boy, he greatly incensed his stern Baptist father with his heretical ideas. Like his farmer father, he had little formal education. Where then did his ideas come from? Like the Transcendentalists, he turned to his experiences of God in nature and in himself, not only to scripture and tradition, to support his intuition concerning the essential good of God and creation. Later Universalism focused more upon "Father Ballou's" concern with rational thinking and social action than upon his religious experience of nature. But Universalism never quite lost that theme .

The Transcendentalists. Within the Unitarian tradition, a similar focus on experiential religion is found among the Transcendentalists. By the 1830s and 1940s, a new generation of largely Unitarian intellectuals spoke out for the validity of intuition as well as reason. According to the definitions in

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[58] Cassara, 53-54.

the model proposed by Strauss and Howe, these were the children of the idealist generation of their

time, as DeBenneville was before them.[59] The most influential of the Transcendentalists, through

the medium of literature, have been Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Neither one shied

away from the word "mysticism," although they clearly meant by it something somewhat different than

what Channing disparaged. Thoreau wrote in his journal:

> I . . . see a crimson cloud in the horizon. You tell me it is a mass of vapor which absorbs all other
> rays and reflects the red, but that is nothing to the purpose, for this red vision excites me, stirs my
> blood, makes my thoughts flow, and I have new and indescribable fancies, and you have not
> touched the secret of that influence. If there is not something mystical in your explanations,
> something unexplainable to the understanding, some elements of mystery, it is quite insufficient.[60]

Ralph Waldo Emerson, another Unitarian Transcendentalist, coined the term "transparent eyeball"

to describe his mystical experiences with nature. In his essay, "Nature," he declares:

> Crossing a bare common, in snow puddles, at twilight under a clouded sky, without having in my
> thoughts any occurrence of special good fortune, I have enjoyed perfect exhilaration. I am glad to
> the brink of fear . . . . There I feel that nothing can befall me in life – no disgrace, no calamity . . .
> which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground – my head bathed in the blithe air, and
> uplifted into infinite space – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am
> nothing; I see all.[61]

In his famous "Divinity School Address," Emerson challenges his young colleague to be a

"Newborn bard of the Holy Ghost."[62] He speaks of the divine bards who are "the friends of my

virtue, of my intellect, of my strength. They admonish me, that the gleams which flash across my

mind, are not mine, but God's; that they had the like, and were not disobedient to the heavenly

vision. So I love them."[63] It is the mark of the Transcendentalists that they believed spiritual truth

was realized by intuition, and could not be received at second hand.

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[59] Strauss and Howe, 195.

[60] Henry D. Thoreau, quoted in The American Transcendentalists: Their Prose and Poetry, ed. Perry Miller (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1957), 75.

[61] Quoted in Miller, 57.

[62] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Divinity School Address," in Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Assoc, 1961), 108.

[63] Emerson, 95.

Emerson and the others also challenged Unitarian orthodoxy by embracing the very Oriental

religions which Parker criticized for discounting the individual and making people easy targets for

despotism. One of Emerson's better efforts at poetry is entitled "Brahma." It portrays positively a loss

of absolute boundaries between individuals. The slayer and the slain, shadow and sunlight, doubter and

doubt are all part of the same all-encompassing "Brahma." [64]

Historian Miller points to the "lust for Bacchic ecstasy which so strangely possessed these children

of New England Puritanism."[65] One last example, from Margaret Fuller, the only well-known woman

among them, shows this clearly. Her poem called "Dryad Song" begins:

> I am immortal! I know it! I feel it!
> Hope floods my heart with delight!

She speaks of being "mad with life," "wild with . . . longing," and ends: "naught can sever me from the

Spirit of Life[66]

There are many other examples from this period. For all its vitality and its influence upon

American literature, however, Transcendentalism never became a majority point of view within the

Unitarian faith. Like many minority points of view, it increased the options of the center, and fostered

diversity. But it did not shape the dominant identity of Unitarianism as it moved towards the twentieth

century.

Humanistic Mysticism

In this century, attempts have been made to integrate Humanistic and mystical ideas into a

more holistic view of human religious experience. Out of the Universalist tradition, in the first half

of the century, came a mystical Humanism, or naturalistic mysticism, propounded in distinct ways

by several clergymen who were founders of experimental, inclusive churches. The two examples

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[64] Quoted in Miller, 228.
[65] Miller, 259.
[66] Quoted in Miller, 260.

discussed here were also respected writers, and one was a seminary professor for part of his professional life.

Clarence Skinner, one-time Dean of Tufts College School of Religion, taught for thirty years, beginning in 1914. In 1920, he founded the Community Church of Boston, and served as its minister for fifteen years. He was a proponent of socialism, a social activist, and a prolific writer.

One biographer calls Clarence Skinner a mystic "in the truest sense of that much abused word." His mysticism was seen as "the wellspring of all that he thought and did."[67] In Skinner's own words:

> If there is anything which ought to be distinctive of religion, it is a feeling of active relationship between the self and a mystic other, better world. There is no reason why this sense of relationship should be confined to a hazy realm which the soul visits after death. Can there not be a social and political mysticism which calls forth an eager faith? Can we not visualize another better world which is not yet real, but is capable of becoming a reality? The old mysticism was individualistic. The other mysticism would contain a diviner urge and lay upon man (sic.) a sense of something great to be done![68]

In contrast to Skinner's "social and political mysticism," that of Kenneth Patton was nature-based. Patton is best known within the denomination as a creative, poetic liturgist. Many churches use his readings at least once a month.

In his book, Man's Hidden Search: An Inquiry into Naturalistic Mysticism, Patton examines the human religious experience at some length. One chapter is entitled, "The Mystical Search." One of Patton's primary convictions, as a mystical humanist or (as he refers to himself) a mystical naturalist, is that the universe only has "one story." He does not recognize the category of supernatural as valid. But that does not, in his opinion, invalidate the experience of mysticism. As

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[67] Alfred Storer Cole, Clarence Skinner: Prophet of Twentieth Century Universalism (Boston: Universalist Historical Society, 1956), 12.

[68] Cole, 12-13.

he explains it, "The same mysticism that once afforded us wings to fly upward can now afford us seven-league boots by which to stride outward in the unknown world of man (sic.) and nature."[69]

Patton makes a strong statement about the importance of mysticism for those of liberal faith. He is concerned that many have discounted and discarded it out of the belief that it must be "the most saturatedly supernaturalistic of all the orthodox apparatus."[70]

Patton describes how mysticism can be viewed in a humanistic context:

> Mysticism is a human affair. It is always men (sic) who are the mystics. Mysticism is the means whereby men outreach themselves, extend themselves beyond previous confines, stretch the tent of their comprehension and observation to cover a larger plot of the universe. No matter how differently men have interpreted their mystical experiences, they have had a common human function. Mysticism is the deep stirring of man's emotions, and emotions can be as profoundly aroused in us as in our supernaturalistic fathers.
> When human life is interpreted as a state of nature, the vividness, ecstasy and emotional vigor of mysticism can enrich us as natively as it does those of different religious convictions. Men of every style of world view stand in need of an emotional deepening, a profundation of experiences. . . . Periods of immediate, non-intellectual absorption are needed by all men. In them we can put aside threadbare assumptions and interpretations, to see the world with a fresh, new eye.[71]

Patton discusses the relationship of art to mysticism. Since he emphasizes the sensuousness of mystical experience, he does not draw a hard line between the two types of experiences. He also stresses that mystical "hunches" are to be checked out against other available sources of knowledge.

Reading Patton's own poetic prose, one has the sense that he knows whereof he speaks from his own experience. He says himself, "I have never heard the strange voice of a divine being, but I have heard the authentic voice speaking to me. It is speaking constantly; we need only to turn from

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[69] Kenneth Patton, Man's Hidden Search: An Inquiry into Naturalistic Mysticism (Boston: Meeting House Press, 1954), 109.

[70] Patton, 97.

[71] Patton, 98.

our business and see and hear."[72] His description of mystical experience has the ring of personal truth:

> Somehow a resolution has come to us. Most often we find no words for it. It is more a conviction of emotional rightness than of logical consistency. It is as if, up from the abyss of feeling and sentiency, of raw openness to the world, out of the secret wells of aloneness and privacy, a knowledge has gathered and broken.
> It includes too many things, it surrounds too many places, for us to define its boundaries. It adds a new facet to every experience that follows it. It includes every other person in an incredible tenderness and concern. Somehow every memory, every emotion, every nerve, every cell, is merged into a maturity of selfhood and fellowship. The moment cannot endure, for the intensity exhausts us. If is continues long we feel in danger of slipping into the chasms of insanity. But for a time we burn and glow with a new radiance of being, and the embers of such hours never completely die away.[73]

The above description, be it noted, contains succinctly all four of William James' qualities of mystical experience: ineffability ("We can find no words for it"), noetic quality ("a knowledge has gathered and broken"), transciency ("The moment cannot endure"), and passivity ("Somehow a resolution has come to us").[74] Patton's mystical naturalism, then, fits a classical definition of mysticism, even though it excludes the supernatural. It also picks up themes from Process Theology, especially Wieman's definition of some mystical experiences as a disintegration of personality organization, during which the creative event can precipitate a deeper and more inclusive reordering (see next section). Patton does not think of the creative event as God, but there is nothing in his thought which bars the incorporation of that dimension by others.

Patton's perspective has had wide-reaching influence through the poetic, mystical quality of many of his liturgical writings. He has influenced two generations of Unitarian Universalists through their weekly worship, even though many of them have never constructed a conscious theory incorporating mystical elements into their theologies.

Process Philosophy

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[72] Patton, 117.
[73] Patton, 106.
[74] James, 380-81.

Not as well known within Unitarian circles at the time, but of considerable importance to the directions of American liberal theology, was the work being done in Process Theology at the University of Chicago from the late 1930s onward. The two main proponents and developers of Whitehead's thought in this country were both Unitarian: Charles Hartshorne and Henry Nelson Wieman. Hartshorne's thought took a more clearly God-centered direction, while Wieman's theology is considered more naturalistic. Both had reasons to reaffirm subjective religious experience.

Hartshorne says in his autobiography, "I respect mystics . . . but not if the mystics lack what most mystics have had, a long discipline in, and commitment to a profound ethical tradition."[75] Hartshorne focuses explicitly upon mysticism in an article published late in his life (1976). In it, he takes issue with Rationalists who claim that direct experience of the ineffable is not possible. The Unsurpassable, he claims, "cannot be merely behind, but must be in, everything; not merely in the reality which appears but in the appearance itself; not merely in the world experienced but in the experience. Thus to claim not to experience God -- or Brahman -- is no less paradoxical than the contradictory claim."[76]

In Hartshorne's opinion, mystics are those people who are "aware of experiencing what we all do experience, whether aware of the fact or not." He goes on to suggest that "it hardly seems possible that our common human nature could embrace so absolute a difference as that between the presence and the sheer absence of That without which there could, if mysticism is valid, be nothing at all."[77] This abstract, philosophical essay concludes with the suggestion that more frequent practice of the meditative disciplines would be beneficial in strengthening people's ability to

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[75] Charles Hartshorne, The Darkness and the Light (New York: State Univ. Press, 1990), 20-21.
[76] Charles Hartshorne, "Mysticism and Rationalistic Metaphysics," in Understanding Mysticism, ed. Richard Woods (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1980), 415.
[77] Hartshorne, "Mysticism," 419.

perceive the Ineffable. Hartshorne suggests, in fact, that humanity could use a little less Rational metaphysics and somewhat more religious experience.

Henry Nelson Wieman does not define God with passive, abstract words such as "ineffable" and "Unsurpassable." Instead, he conceives of the Divine as the Creative Event, acting within all reality to bring the new into being. Wieman interprets "spectacular instances of intuition" as God "doing something to attract our attention." He offers a working definition of mysticism:

> Mystical experience, in one of its many forms, is an instance of intuition. It is called "mystical" only when it is radical and revolutionary in transforming the mind and personality . . . . Mystical experience, most generally speaking, is a breakdown of the organization of the mind.[78]

Wieman includes in his definition experiences triggered by drugs, by stress, by excesses of various sorts, as well as by a clash of conflicting meanings in areas carrying intense feelings. When this last occurs, a significant transformative religious experience may be the result:

> The breakdown may be transitional to a new integration of the mind and personality, with more scope and richness of meaning and more power of action. In this last kind of mystical experience, we have a direct experience of God if God is the creative event. If the individual is properly equipped with traditional symbols and interpretations, he (sic) may recognize this seizure to be the direct apprehension of God, although the theology with which he interprets the deity he has apprehended may be quite mythical. These spectacular instances of creativity, compulsively attracting attention to themselves, do not equip the mind with concepts for interpreting correctly what is there and then undergone. Nevertheless, this is the divine presence and the divine work and, when properly analyzed and interpreted, yields knowledge of God, if God is creative.[79]

Wieman's explanation preshadows that proposed more recently by Arthur Deikman (M.D.) in his book The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy,[80] published by UUA's Beacon Press, and other recent writings exploring the therapeutic transformative power of certain "mystical" experiences in people's lives. Deikman suggests that the mystical experience often succeeds at doing what therapy tries to do, namely dissolve aspects of personality structure so they can be

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[78] Henry N. Wieman, The Source of Human Good (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1946), 186.

[79] Wieman, Source of Human Good, 186-87.

[80] See Deikman, The Observing Self: Mysticism and Psychotherapy (Boston: Beacon, 1982), 40.

integrated in a more healthy way. His contention is that true mystics experience reality as connected, rather than made up of distinctly separate objects and persons. From within this experience, it is genuinely possible to have immediate experience and knowledge of reality beyond the boundaries of one's own person.

Both Hartshorne and Wieman see themselves as accomplishing an integration of ideas not previously available for the understanding of mystical experience. They share their dependence upon Whitehead's process philosophy. Hartshorne stresses metaphysical elements of theory, while Wieman draws more upon psychology and the natural sciences.

Feminism

Feminism, both theological and political, has been an important influence on the changes across the generations within Unitarian Universalism. Until very recently feminist influences upon Unitarian Universalism were imported from outside the tradition, so I will not discuss them here at length. Of interest, however, is an essay written by Rosemary Radford Ruether, one of the most influential "imported" feminists among Unitarian Universalists. Writing about "How I see Unitarian Universalists," Ruether cautions us to "be aware of the way in which rationalism has been a tool of a kind of masculinism which is traditionally fearful of the body, of the intuitive, of feelings, of all those dimensions of life traditionally considered feminist."[81] She encourages this tradition to be open to less verbal modes of religious experience, and to challenge the "new order of domination" which she believes scientific rationalism has created. If she were a Unitarian Universalist, she says:

> I would want to ask to what extent Unitariansim has become fixated upon a certain style which was liberal in the past, but today has become a tool of the new social establishment, a new aristocracy of reason and science. In order to be socially progressive in the 20th century, one might have to reach out, not only for new questions,

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[81] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "How I See Unitarian Universalists," in "As Others See Us: Ecumenical Perspectives On Unitarian Universalism." Unitarian Universalist Christian 42, no.4 (1987): 45-46.

but for new styles of discourse and new dimensions of human experience, not traditionally included in the paraphernalia of the rationalists. . . ."[82]

Very recently, the tradition is hearing original voices from within its ranks speaking out on these issues. One development is the publication of <u>Cries of the Spirit: A Celebration of Women's Spirituality</u>.[83] Minister/editor Marilyn Sewell explains her purpose in putting together this extensive resource book of women's writings:

> <u>Cries of the Spirit</u> addresses itself to the spiritual and the theological, the realm in which ultimate values are considered and claimed. Far from being peripheral to our existence, as the secular world of scientism and materialism might have us think, the realm of the spirit is in fact the essential, for what we claim as our god and what we conceive of as the good directs our every breath and every move. Spirituality has too long been an almost exclusively male realm, resting in abstract principle and institutionalized order. In contrast, women tend towards a relational sacrality that is based on the natural world of earth and flesh. The woman's perspective is healing and life-giving, one that we can ill afford to ignore.[84]

Another important new voice which is gaining in influence is that of the President of Starr King School of Religion, the Unitarian Universalist seminary in Berkeley, California. As the first woman president of a UU seminary, Rebecca Parker stands in a visible and influential position. Recently, the UUA magazine, <u>The World</u> published an essay written by her entitled "Making Love as a Means of Grace." For Parker, personal salvation can be experienced "as a restored communion with all of life, the establishment of a sense of creative power, and the acquiring of a deeply felt knowledge of one's intrinsic worth and joy in being."[85] In conclusion, she tells us: "Sexual intimacy, at its best, teaches us this truth about ourselves: that joy is grounded in relational power. Thus, it frees us from the sin of pride (wanting to be completely in control) and the terror of despair (feeling ourselves to be completely powerless).[86]

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[82] Ruether, 46.

[83] Marilyn Sewell, ed., <u>Cries of the Spirit: A Celebration of Women's Spirituality</u> (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

[84] Sewell, xv.

[85] Rebecca Parker, "Making Love as a Means of Grace," <u>World: The Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Assoc.</u>, 8, no.4 (1994): 23.

[86] Parker, 24.

Not surprisingly, given the evidence of this research project, both Sewell and Parker are Unitarian Universalist clergywomen in the 36-50 (younger mid-life) age cohort. The feminism of the older mid-life women, as influential as it has been in giving voice to their reality and catalyzing change, was shaped by voices from the larger culture. Now, however, younger mid-life women clergy are beginning to speak with an original voice and vision from within the tradition. Small as the study sample is, the telling differences between younger mid-life clergywomen and elder clergymen is supported by this shift in public voices speaking out and shaping a vision of the tradition's future directions.

Changing Unitarian Universalist Identity

The Merger of Unitarianism and Universalism

In 1961, after many years of discussion, the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America became the Unitarian Universalist Association of North America. Unlike many denominational mergers, this one appears to have brought together the best of each tradition. The Unitarians had become known in some circles as "God's frozen people" due to their commitment to rational religion. But Universalism had historically been a warm-hearted faith, focused upon the universal love of God. It is my contention that one contributing factor to the generational shift in religious experience and understanding among Unitarian Universalists is the continuing unfolding of the potential of this merger. The Universalists have more openly claimed an emotional, God-centered and even "mystical" faith. Historically, they have welcomed the participation of women in ministry more warmly. It is also from among their ranks that some of the most effective efforts at integrating humanism and mysticism through worship life have originated, as discussed in the preceding section.

A New Statement of Principles

At the time of the merger in 1961, the Unitarian Universalist Association created a statement of Purposes and Principles. This statement, primarily reflecting traditional Unitarian values, served the tradition well for over twenty years. However, in 1983 a three-year process began to revise the Principles with widespread participation from the membership at large. For three successive Annual General Assemblies, every phrase was debated. The mood was cooperative and inclusive. One basic decision was to word the Principles as a covenant. The preamble now states: "We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:" In June of 1985, the new statement of Purposes and Principles was adopted. It reaffirmed some of the core traditional convictions of Unitarianism and Universalism. But it also articulated several new principles which spoke more to the heritage of Universalism, and to the faith perspectives evolving in our own time.

Search for truth. Perhaps the most basic of the "traditional" Unitarian positions reaffirmed was the one which came first in the 1961 Statement: affirming that the Association shall "Support the free and disciplined search for truth as the foundation of religious fellowship."[87] The new Principles adopted in 1985 state simply that we covenant to affirm and promote "A free and responsible search for truth and meaning."[88] Even this most traditional of Principles, however, is being understood differently.

This principle is a historically venerable one within our two traditions, especially the Unitarian. The Socinian/Unitarians in Poland wrote eloquent treatises on the subject of freedom of religious conscience and open inquiry decades before essays on toleration were penned by English and French philosophers. Unitarians and Universalists were leaders in the movement into using critical methods in Biblical study.

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[87] Harry Scholefield, ed., The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide (Boston: UUA, 1983), 92.
[88] Unitarian Universalist Assoc. Bylaws, Section C.2.1

In an essay on this principle, Sara Campbell, who is a Unitarian Universalist minister, begins with a quote from Whitehead: "Religion is the ultimate ideal and the hopeless quest."[89] For her, this statement pinpoints a critical tension in Unitarian Universalism between an ultimate which we do not believe we can ever know, yet continue to quest for, and the commitment to "truths" which we need to engage in effective action in the world. She goes on:

> Our faith requires that we be both committed and tentative, and that we trust not only objective evidences but our subjective, intuitive understandings to shape a religious context for meaning, community, and vision. While we journey individually in the free search for truth and meaning, our responsibilities to one another and to our deepest understandings of Truth challenge us to unite in creating a religion of empowerment, healing, and transformation.[90]

This principle deals with Unitarian Universalist epistemology. How do we know what we know? As the evidence from this study indicates, different people (and different generations) have different answers to this question. Sarah, as one of those mid-life clergy women who agree most strongly with some of the more "interconnected" understandings of religious experience, is a voice for her generation.

Historically, the open search for truth supported by Unitarians and Universalists has remained a central principle, but its emphases have changed. During the Enlightenment, the truths searched for were rational. The Bible was considered a source of truth, to which reason must by rigorously applied for the most helpful understandings. Most scholars suspended reason on occasion, in dealing with the subject such as miracles, because of the respect for the Bible as a source of Truth. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Transcendentalists lifted up inner authority and intuition as sources of direct truth. During the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, the arena to which the searchlight of reason was applied became less frequently scripture, and more frequently experience. Science became the new authority, and the authority which the Transcendentalists accorded to feeling

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[89] Sara Campbell, ""A Free and Responsible Search for Truth and Meaning," in What Unitarian Universalists Believe: Living Principles for a Living Faith (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Assoc, 1987), 52.
[90] Campbell, 41.

and intuition was out of favor. In the struggle between tentativeness and commitment, tentativeness often came out ahead. Now that paradigm is being widely challenged.

Campbell invites UUs to reclaim what James Fowler calls "the logic of conviction."[91] I agree with her definition of truth as including ways of knowing such as feeling, intuition, and imagination. She explains:

> To affirm "my way," claiming ourselves as authority, is to claim our subjective ways of knowing as well as our objective ways. . . . It is to admit that sometimes we feel embraced or challenged by a force in the universe that for centuries of human history has been called God and has been worshipped for its beauty, its power, and its mystery. . . . It is to admit that something inside ourselves– something more than our intellects – draws us toward perfection and wholeness. It is to admit that a child's smile or a line of poetry or a sunset can have more power to move us than a thousand sermons preached from our church pulpits. [92]

In recent history, the denomination has resolved the tension between individual authority and the "sense of Truth which is affirmed by the community" in favor of the former. An effort is being made at this time to redress the balance.

James Luther Adams has been a leader in the articulation of a renewed belief in a creative reality not of our own making upon which we are dependent. The Unitarian Universalist process theologians have been giving shape to that reality, and supported renewed respect for the feeling dimension of human experience. They have encouraged commitment to creative ideas of God and the cosmos which can undergird hopeful action towards personal and social transformation. Feminist theologians are as important as process theologians to this struggle for "new" ways of knowing; they recognize that the new ways are not new at all.

Adams, Campbell and other Unitarian Universalist leaders balance a central emphasis upon creativity as a way of knowing with a renewed awareness of being a people in history. That, too, is an important dimension in which truths reside. Campbell scolds the denomination for its neglect of its roots, and speaks of the prophets who have "risen from our ranks. . . to admonish us repeatedly of the

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[91] Campbell, 47.
[92] Campbell, 47.

importance of remembering our own past." She quotes Henry Whitney Bellows, a Unitarian

institutionalist who lived in the middle nineteenth century: "Our peril derives from a disrespect and

forgetfulness of the past, a contempt for the institutions that transmit its life, an isolation in self-

complacency, a rash abandonment of the conquests, the experience and the truths of Humanity

historically studied and integrated."[93]

Campbell beautifully summarizes the challenge of the principle of "a free and disciplined search

for truth and meaning" for our age, a challenge rooted in both creativity and history:

> The key to our maintaining the balance of tentativeness and commitment in a religion both private and public is passion. Passion for life itself. Passion for beauty. Passion for justice. Passion for goodness. Passion for the truth that frees us. . . . it is essential to our growth and future as a movement that we reclaim the passionate spirit of our predecessors – that we act in response to something Ultimate that demands our loyalty, draws us forward, and gives meaning to our lives. The source of that passionate spirit is passed along by people in every age whom we recognize for their special authority. These are people who seem to answer a call, who speak with authority because they live truthfully and authentically.
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> The foundation which we recognize in the authentic people of the past and present becomes the foundation for the future. We cannot reap the harvest we have inherited from the Unitarians and Universalists of the past without passionately sowing our own seeds of commitment for the future. Let us consider, then, what it is that fills us, each and all, with a passion for goodness, a passion for justice, a passion for beauty.[94]

The dominant attitude of the Unitarian tradition, if not the Universalist, has distrusted passion

because of the harm which has been done in its name throughout history, but the mid-life Unitarian

Universalists of this time, especially the clergywomen among them, are articulating a creative,

passionate, historically-rooted way of religious knowing.

Justice and equity. The new statement of Principles reiterates a historical interest in justice

and equity, giving it a statement of its own. This principle addresses the prophetic and the

eschatological dimensions of faith. It is rooted in the second of five "source" statements in the

document, asserting that Unitarian Universalists draw their faith convictions from: "Words and deeds of

prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice,

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[93] Campbell, 51.
[94] Campbell, 53.

compassion, and the transforming power of love."[95] Unitarian Universalists of all generations feel most kinship with those sections of the Judeo-Christian scriptures which are prophetic in style.

Justice and equity are aspects of "unrealized eschatology." We embody them but imperfectly in the best of human societies, and affirm the importance of a continuing struggle to realize them. Different generations of Unitarian Universalists may focus upon different aspects of the struggle as most important to them, but every generation grapples with the struggle.

Rights of conscience and the use of the democratic process. Both of ideas have been traditionally of concern to Unitarians and Universalists. It is not accidental that this principle, like two others, pair an individual principle with a communal principle. Keeping that balance is one of the primary challenges in the thought and function of the UU Association.

These paired principles grew out of the Reformation. Beginning with the Polish and Transylvanian Unitarians, powerful and influential writing from our religious movement has influenced the course of political history for over four hundred years. The Constitution of the United States was significantly shaped by the influence of Unitarians and Universalists. Three out of the first four presidents of the United States had strong Unitarian ties. There is a natural partnership between democracy and theology which supports the priesthood and prophethood of all believers within the testing context of community. Unitarian Universalists do not generally turn to scripture or tradition to settle differences on issues of conscience at this point in history, so the correctives of reason, experience and community carry much importance.

The primary issues addressed by this principle are those of religious authority and methodology. The Unitarian Universalist movement has tended to be anti-clerical at times in its emphatic emphasis upon the democratic principle in the spiritual realm. Yet Mark Belletini (a younger mid-life clergyman who participated in this study) points out concerning the idea of the priesthood of all believers: "This

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[95] UUA Bylaws, Section C.2.1.

seems to me a romantic and sentimental self-deception. To lead worship week after week is not 'equal' to sitting in the pews week after week. . . . As Paul put it, seeing is not the same as walking."[96] He suggests that we be more precise in acknowledging that "the **wellsprings** of ministry" are equally available to all – compassion, love of wisdom, direct assess to the divine, personal wholeness – but that we stop discounting the training and commitment and vocation of professional ministry. Perhaps then we will again value theologians.

Neither personal conscience nor the democratic process are clear-cut. Both are difficult, messy, imperfect, and hopefully open to creative inspiration. They need to be tested against one another, and against the highest universal standard we can envision. But we make a faith statement that they can be trusted. Historically, Unitarian Universalist methodology and basis for religious authority have been among the dominant ideas which have united us. This principle, like the last, addresses how we know what we know. It also affirms the equal worth of persons as sources of their own faith.

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. Traditional Unitarian Universalist democratic principles and prophetic vision join with a universalist perspective in supporting the goal of world community. An essay by history of religions professor Frederick Streng explores this principle in terms of Unitarian Universalist heritage which recognizes that "ultimate truth is not limited to one time, place, culture, tradition, or methodology; it is available universally and in divergent experiences."[97] The tradition's current diversity of experience stands within a history of (at least in theory) respecting differences, a current which is broadening its scope in these times.

Again, this most traditional of Principles has been given a new shape, this time influenced by the participatory and process orientation so characteristic of the late mid-lifers within the denomination. Streng describes the open dialogical process as it contributes to building world community:

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[96] Mark Belletini, "Mysticism: Accepting Spiritual Growth," in What Unitarian Universalists Believe: Living Principles for a Living Faith (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Assoc., 1987), 33.
[97] Frederick Streng, "The Goal of World Community," in What Unitarian Universalists Believe: Living Principles for a Living Faith (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Assoc., 1987), 67.

The participants in dialogue must be willing to expose the depth of their own convictions while recognizing the depth – if not accepting the formulations – of another person's convictions. Each person must attempt to evoke the best, the deepest, the most enlightening aspects of the dialogue partner's orientation. Instead of looking for ways to discredit your dialogue partner, you continually ask yourself if you have probed the deepest intention of your partner's view. . . .

The quality of real encounter involves the universal need of one human being to respond to another human being. Direct human engagement evokes a response . . . . To share your deepest religious commitment with another person in a mutual exploration of the fullest and freest living can evoke an awareness of the depth of life which includes, but is also beyond, each individual expression.[98]

With a commitment to dialogue between individuals of differing beliefs and experiences within our communities, Unitarian Universalists may have the potential of leadership in the building of a global theology, as well as in encouraging the resolution of political and economic issues in global terms. But the starting place, as the traditional Yom Kippur ritual tells us, is within. The dialogue this study is meant to encourage between the generations within the tradition, and between people whose experience and understanding differs, regardless of age, is a foundation for wider dialogue.

Humanist teachings. The rational faith traditionally associated with Unitarianism and most affirmed by the current elder generation is recognized as one of the five "sources" from which the new Principles are drawn: "Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit."[99] Three of the other four sources also amplify points of view already present in the 1961 statement. The remaining source, however, is one of the most revealing new additions.

Direct experience of transcending mystery and wonder. The new "source" statement added to the 1985 Statement of Principles speaks directly to the focus of this study: "Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and

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[98] Streng, 63.
[99] UUA Bylaws, Section C.2.1.

an openness to the forces which create and uphold life."[100] "Direct experience" of transcendence is one

way that mysticism is understood. To quote Mark Belletini:

> Mysticism respects our subjectivity, in the same way that critical religious thought respects our intellect. Religious communities, rooted in the rich loam of our shared history, provide the best ground for the nurture of both our critique and our deepening spirituality. We can sing our faith as well as argue it, we can love the silence as well as our words, we can act in concert to bring justice to the world even as we guard our individual spirits.[101]

This is the voice of a young mid-life Idealist, a voice which is heard widely enough to be one

of those shaping the new directions of this faith.

Compassion. The addition of "compassion" to "justice and equity" in the new second

principle was the result of an amendment from the floor of the General Assembly by one of the

younger mid-life clergywomen who are represented in this study. While concern for compassion is

certainly not new in this faith tradition which has played such an important part in making this

nation's institutions and laws more humane, lifting it up alongside justice as an articulated

principle is one result of the growing influence of women's experience and values within the

denomination.

Where justice is an abstraction representing unrealized eschatology, compassion bridges the

unrealized and the realized. It is a response to the unavoidable imperfection of human individuals and

societies, and the unavoidable reality of pain and suffering. At the same time, it represents "the Kingdom

among us" (Unitarian Universalists would prefer the new usage, "commonwealth of God"). In moments

of compassion, we experience the "spirit among us," the creative event which connects us and makes us

whole. As a bridge between unrealized and realized eschatology, compassion is a singularly powerful

religious act. It is not entirely accidental that compassion was unconsciously almost omitted from the

Principles, because historically this tradition's sense of justice, although based upon compassion, is

impatient with just "being present," and anxious to get on with changing unjust situations.

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[100] UUA Bylaws, Section C.2.1.
[101] Belletini, 26.

Encouragement to spiritual growth. The theological shift within Unitarian Universalism is both reflected in and further encouraged by two completely new Principles in the 1985 Statement. The first is a covenant to affirm and promote: "Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations."[102] The first phrase of the principle draws deliberately upon the source statement: "Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves." The second phrase represents an exciting development in the new principles. The word "spiritual" was accepted back into common usage among Unitarian Universalists.

A resource essay on this principle by Mark Belletini focuses upon the concept of mysticism, and sets out to illustrate that Unitarians and Universalists have been mystical as well as rational from their beginnings. He quotes Quaker mystic Thomas Kelly, who says that mystical experience "involves the whole . . . lives on resources and powers that make individuals radiant and triumphant, groups tolerant and bonded in mutual concern."[103] He also points out that the early Hebrews had a God which "could be addressed in poetry and song and dance but never by name."[104]

Belletini perceives Unitarian Universalist nay-saying of "idolatries" to be a direct legacy of the Jewish tradition. He also finds historical Christian roots for our core attitude of acceptance/affirmation. For Origen in the third century, he points out, the Bible "was no sledgehammer but an evocative, impossible rose blooming among us for our delight, not our condemnation."[105] The message is that all of life is sacramental, yet nothing which we can conceive must be taken to fully contain God.

The subdued wording of this principle, chosen so as not to offend the rational Humanistic sector (originally it was "love" instead of "acceptance") may obscure its power, yet captures an increasingly important Unitarian Universalist emphasis. Love must be defined in a way which includes deep acceptance of people where they are, along with the encouragement to grow. The tradition's rejection of

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[102] UUA Bylaws, Section C.2.1.
[103] Belletini, 27
[104] Belletini, 28.
[105] Belletini, 29.

Hell, and of a God whose love does not include acceptance, has significant ramifications. Belletini puts it, "It is not by cool logic that hell is abolished but by **experience**, on a daily basis, of the power of love, immanent and certain as the dawn."[106] Considering the inverse relationship in the research results of this study of age with fearfulness, and to a degree with understanding one's experiences as "real interconnectedness," this is an interesting statement. Is it experience or logic that abolishes fearfulness in the elders studied? Or the habitual philosophy of their generation?

Belletini draws upon the Christian tradition in a knowledgeable and sensitive way. He explains his Christology:

> The prime example of a mystical prophet for me is Jesus, with his unyielding refusal to dominate, control, explain, or exclude. . . . Jesus! Mystic grounded not only in the richness of his tradition but also in the compelling power of his own inner life. More than any other story, the saga of Jesus' fidelity "to spirit, not the letter," grants me a comforting trust that to criticize the world **solo** is not necessarily madness and that if love is love, it is never wasted.[107]

One thing that acceptance and spiritual growth have in common is their stretching characteristic. Neither fits well with valuing control. Both are incarnate in the particular situation. Henry Nelson Wieman points out that one cannot plan for the creative event, because it is precisely in the in-breaking of the new and unconceived that the creative event is manifest.[108] This idea is not one many of the elder generation of Unitarian Universalists find comfortable. In fact, Wieman's definition of "mysticism" as an experience of breakdown of the personality so change can come about may well be exactly what makes so many of them uncomfortable. But the mid-life generations who played such a crucial role in shaping the new Principles are often more open to such a possibility.

Belletini quotes a friend: "Poetry is the fierce inward commitment to shatter all categories,"[109] and he recommends that approach to religious language and imagery. Words are provisional; and must not take them too literally. Unitarian Universalists, especially those of Belletini's generation, are beginning

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[106] Belletini, 30

[107] Belletini, 28-29.

[108] Wieman, Source of Human Good, 57.

[109] Belletini, 38.

to discover that the Spirit unites them more than the words divide them. Belletini sees Unitarian Universalists as having a "redemptive task" in our affirmation of theological pluralism. Let us affirm, he exhorts, "that we are indeed spiritual people but that our Pentecost spirit sings in many languages."[110]

Acceptance is not of people in general but particular people in community, with their wounds and imperfections and different perspectives. Moments of creative interchange cannot be programmed or their direction controlled, but a religious community can do much to prepare the ground, individually and collectively.

The ground-breaking is hard work. Scott Peck, in his book The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace, points out that building community involves moving from courtesy through a stage of chaos before true community is possible.[111] Many Unitarian Universalists appear to enjoy remaining in the state of chaos, as they choose to remain in Fowler's (reactive independent) stage four of faith development. This new third principle requires the relinquishing of chaotic independence. It affirms community, as well as acceptance of individuals.

Belletini's essay ends with two valuable affirmations:

> Let us remember that we ourselves did not begin the song that grows within us like a sacred child, and let us give birth to the melody with movement as well as the lyric tongue. Let us learn to dance the Word and not crucify it; to embody it, not bury it in a wordy tomb. Let us practice Easter, and co-create a mystical body.[112]

Respect for the interdependent web. The second completely new Principle covenants "member congregations" to affirm and promote "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." This phrase was not widely known or used until nine years ago. Yet, as research for this study shows, it has become one of the most popular "models" of God among Unitarian Universalists of

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[110] Belletini, 39.
[111] M. Scott Peck. The Different Drum: Community-Making and Peace (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 86.
[112] Belletini, 39

all ages. It reflected a changing cosmology in 1985, but being stated as a principle has accelerated that change dramatically.

This last principle represents most vividly the new directions in thought which have impacted the denomination. It is informed by "new physics," process theology, feminist theology, and ecological concerns.

A reflection essay on the principle of the "interconnected web" focuses upon three ideas: The Universe is ultimately unknowable, the "one unchanging law is change itself," and all things are connected with each other.[113] The minister-author Judith Walker-Riggs (another mid-lifer) suggests that this principle reflects a cosmic theology. She points out the intriguing fact that early Polish Unitarians supported and taught the views of Copernicus while they were still condemned in most of Europe.

There is, of course, nothing unique to Unitarian Universalists in the move towards a cosmic theology at this point in history. The creation-centered theology of Matthew Fox and the thought of non-Unitarian Universalist feminist and process theologians, as well as philosophically inclined physicists like Brian Swimme, have all been struggling to image a cosmic faith. But it is certainly a valid direction for our faith in this era, one led by the mid-life generations and embraced enthusiastically by young adults. Unitarian Universalists bring a somewhat different history and perspective to that imaging process, and contribute to wider theological thought through those process theologians who are a part of this tradition.

It is a challenge to the humanist and individualistic strands of this tradition to stress the interconnectedness of all things. But the principle of the interconnected web not only extends the other principles, it gives a firm foundation to them as well. It is the alpha and the omega, which returns us again to the beginning, and weaves them all together into a coherent whole. The current study affirms that this idea of interconnectedness speaks to the experience of elders as well as to the mid-lifers, and expresses a shift in consensual reality across different theological positions.

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[113] Judith Walker-Riggs, in What Unitarian Universalists Believe: Living Principles for a Living Faith (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Assoc. 1987), 75.

Some have argued that being aware of the size of the universe makes apparent human insignificance, and the cold, uncaring nature of reality. But the passion for truth called for earlier is fueled by a cosmic vision. A nineteenth-century female astronomer, ahead of her time, wrote:

> Small as is our whole system compared with the infinitude of creation, brief as is our life compared with the cycles of time, we are so tethered to all by the beautiful dependencies of law, that not only the sparrow's fall is felt to the outermost bound, but the vibrations set in motion by the words that we utter reach through all space and the tremor is felt through all time.[114]

Walker-Riggs suggests that the universe can teach us not indifference, but tolerance, acceptance of the process of creative change, and interconnectedness. It teaches tolerance "in all its multiplicity and outrageous richness."[115] Our concern for good and evil, for justice and compassion, are not alien to the universe, because we are not alien, but children of the process which created us.

This author talks about her experience in a tense board meeting: "there I am, and I am having a wonderful time because I am watching the power of the universe (the Holy Spirit). I am watching it sizzle and fizz around the room, brushing now here, now there, lighting my colleagues' faces with momentary gold." A colleague with whom she shares the experience mutters, "Humph . . . the Holy Spirit is so undependable!"[116] Faith, she points out, comes from a Greek word meaning to let loose, to free. This is a point of argument among some of the informants in this study. One mid-life clergyman wrote that he found it very difficult to tell intuition from imagination in his own inner life, and several others (males or elders) expressed similar views.

Many among the Unitarian Universalist leadership believe that exploration of this principle is the direction of the denomination's future. A "Seventh Principle" project has come into being, and is engaging the imagination and energy of clergy and laity alike. As always, there is unlikely to be

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[114] Walker-Riggs, 76.
[115] Walker-Riggs, 77.
[116] Walker-Riggs, 79.

unanimity, but some part of the cosmic vision is infecting more and more Unitarian Universalists of all ages, and removing them from the ranks of "God's frozen people."

A New Hymnal

In addition to its new Statement of Principles and Purposes, the Unitarian Universalist Association has recently completed a hymnal revision which has been in process for over five years. Input was solicited widely from the member churches, and hymns tentatively selected were field-tested in congregations before final selection. Mark Belletini, quoted above, chaired the committee which made selections and put the hymnbook together.

There are two striking things about this hymnal which both speak for and contribute to the shifting world view and faith perspectives within Unitarian Universalism. Called Singing the Living Tradition, the hymnal is structured around the Statement of Principles, and is helping to popularize the new ideas incorporated in this statement. An effort was also made to make it inclusive of diverse theological positions, diverse cultures, and diverse styles of music. While old favorites were retained, much of the music is contemporary, and a number of pieces are the work of Unitarian Universalist women composers (formerly a rare commodity).

The section on readings also reflects both diversity and evidence of the shifting consensual religious reality brought out in the current study. Many more of them are written by women than in the previous hymnal, and many of those women are mid-life clergywomen.

It is a secondary thesis of this study that theological shift is fueled by changes in worship rather than by wide-spread first-hand exposure to theological writings. This new hymnal is accelerating the very changes which are reflected in its creation. Mid-life clergy such as Mark Belletini and the men and women whose readings have been included in this hymnal are already forces for change beyond their own congregations.

The Feminization of the Ministry

As the results of this study were charted, it became clear that the female clergy particularly exemplified the newer patterns unfolding within the denomination. The contrast between the young mid-life female clergy and the elder male clergy stands out sharply on several measures, especially "communion with God" and "intercession for others" as purposes for prayer/meditation.

At this point in history, leadership of the denomination is shifting, and women clergy are an important part of the shift. A survey of the listing of ordained ministers in a recent directory gives force to the sheer magnitude of the change. Of those ministers ordained over twenty years ago, only one in twenty are women. But among those ordained in the past twenty years, one in two is a woman -- a factor of ten increase.[117] The trend is accelerating -- in the past ten years 60 percent of those ordained have been women. According to Department of Ministry statistics, the number of men in the active ministry has increased by a little over half in the past thirteen years, but the number of women has increased fourfold, to the point where there are almost half as many women as men in the active ministry . In contrast, ten times as many retired ministers are men.[118].

If mid-life women, and women clergy in particular, are the primary bearers of changing patterns within the Unitarian Universalist tradition, and since their presence in the ministerial leadership of the denomination is increasing so dramatically, it seems likely that those changes may continue to accelerate under their leadership. The full impact of this change has yet to be experienced. But the differences in experience, theology and understanding between the younger mid-life clergywomen and the elder clergymen in this study may be a harbinger of things to come. It would be helpful to expand the study population to test these findings more definitively.

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[117] This information is derived from the Unitarian Universalist Association Directory (Boston: UUA, 1993).
[118] Unitarian Universalist Assoc., Department of Ministry Statistics, June 1980 and February 1994.

Summary

The three sets of contextual materials examined in this chapter shed some light upon the changing patterns in both subjective religious experience and theology within the Unitarian Universalist tradition. Patterns of theological thought similar to those currently growing in popularity have surfaced before within the tradition, but have remained minority positions. A combination of social factors, within the denomination and within the society at large, is contributing to the momentum of these ideas at this time in history. Within the denomination, the mid-life generations are primary spokespersons for these ideas. The growing presence of women in the clergy over the past twenty years is a major contributing factor, although mid-life male clergy are making significant contributions to reshaping denominational identity as well.

Both the historical data and the sociological model presented for consideration illustrate a dynamic and shifting interaction at work between concrete rationalism and intuitive idealism. Intuitive and idealistic elements have been discounted through history by some of the most influential spokespersons of the Unitarian Universalist tradition, but they are present in people's lives and need context for understanding. The emotional and irrational extremes feared by our forebears and many older Unitarian Universalists today are best avoided by a sophisticated and informed understanding of diverse ways of knowing. An open-minded encounter with diverse ways of knowing will help us to understand, test, and act responsibly upon our religious insights.

CHAPTER 5

Implications for Pastoral Ministry

This project was undertaken in response to the contemporary debate within Unitarian Universalist circles concerning theological differences, particularly differences between religious humanists and natural/mystical theists. It is the thesis of this project that these differences, not only in theology but in the religious experience which undergirds personal theology, are at least in part a difference between generations due to shifts in life experience and contextual learning. Although it may look that way much of the time, the debate is not about whether one abstract idea is more "correct" or "truthful" or "mature" than another. It is about real people struggling to give voice to their own unique experience, and endeavoring to have that experience honored by the members of their religious communities.

The findings of this research project offer evidence that the Unitarian Universalists' theological debate is in fact tied to life experience. The project itself is rooted in the conviction that theology cannot be separated from life. So what contributions to shaping the on-going life of this tradition might evolve out of the perspective and data presented in this project? There are three primary areas in which I see this project contributing: spiritual counseling, religious education, and evolving denominational identity.

Significance of Findings to Spiritual Counseling

Attitude Towards Diverse Points of View

In the abstract, Unitarian Universalists have long believed in respecting diverse points of view on matters of religious belief. Child of the radical left wing of the Reformation, early Unitarianism spoke out strongly for freedom of conscience, and carried the Protestant principle of the "priesthood of all believers" far beyond what Calvin and Luther intended. But historically, Unitarians (more than Universalists) have tended to an elitism of the intellect marked by suspicion

and distrust of emotion in religion. Mystical experiences of the type De Benneville recounted were considered marks of "lower class" religion (although De Benneville himself was a French aristocrat). Ruether's admonition to Unitarian Universalists to break free of a new "domination" — that of scientific rationalism — must be taken to heart.

The data from this study encourage us to step back from our personal theological preferences and to listen to the richness of each other's differing experiences. It helps us to understand that different generations tend naturally towards differing perspectives. It reminds us to respect those differences, as well as the gender differences in experience and understanding documented by the study. By extension, this research material reminds us to respect the differences of individual personality and of culture as well. This respect is particularly vital in the process of spiritual counseling.

Unitarian Process philosopher Henry Nelson Wieman articulates eloquently in his final book, Creative Freedom: Vocation of Liberal Religion, two primary ways that religious liberals can be oriented towards life: ideal-centered or creativity-centered.[1] People whose philosophy of life is ideal-centered focus upon abstracts and ideas of perfection. For them, all the rich diversity of incarnate life is simplified by pre-conceived images of what is "right" or "mature" or "proper." But those whose philosophy is centered in the value of creativity embrace the almost infinite diversity of real experience, and open themselves to being carried in new and unexplored directions by the Divine which is "the Creative Event." Unity in religion is not an abstract unity, but a "rich and catholic unity-in-difference."[2]

Wieman reminded us decades ago of the danger inherent in the very shaping of the abstractions which allow us to think more "clearly." Our ideas lose something important,

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[1] Henry Nelson Wieman, Creative Freedom: Vocation of Liberal Religion (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1982).

[2] Henry Nelson Wieman and Walter Marshall Horton, The Growth of Religion (Chicago: Willett, Clark & Co., 1938), 229.

"as philosophy and science refine and clarify them and make them more efficient as tools, but leave them increasingly shorn of reference to that matrix of existence which surges about us, which pervades us, and which awakens in us the deeps of emotion and propulsion for living."[3]

Spiritual counseling, at its best, is precisely about helping people to be aware of and to live harmoniously within that "matrix of existence which surges about us, which pervades us, and which awakens in us the deeps of emotion and propulsion for living." The data from this study give us a taste of that varied and complex embedded matrix which shapes our more abstract conceptions concerning the nature of reality, and remind us to return to our embedded matrix and listen to one another.

Validating Subjective Ways of "Knowing"

It is an important part of a minister's task, in the role of spiritual counselor, not only to validate the uniqueness of individual experience, but to validate interior and subjective ways of "knowing." This project looked at how age and gender influences how people decide what they believe. Those who give more weight to intuition, and somewhat less to reason (all informants gave some weight to reason), are more likely to have had the experiences studied, and more likely to pray or meditate frequently. It is probable that younger clergy, especially women (who give these experiences most relevance and value themselves), are encouraging their parishioners to trust their own ways of knowing, within the matrix of relationships which test all of our convictions.

Providing Resources

At a district Unitarian Universalist conference a year ago, there was a workshop on "Coming out of the Closet with a Personal God." The room was packed, and the stories told were diverse and powerful. One of the therapist/leaders informed the participants that, if Unitarian Universalists came to him with a "shameful" secret they had not told anyone else, it was not likely

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[3] Wieman and Horton, 241.

to be about the more expected aspects of life, such as sexuality. The secret was likely to be "I've has a mystical experience, and I need to know if I'm going crazy."

Especially among young people in this study, even simple experiences of "oneness/harmony," "light/joy," or "intuitive certainty" have triggered fear responses. This finding suggests that an important aspect of spiritual counseling for Unitarian Universalists, especially the young, is to provide information and resources which help them to know that they are not, in fact, "going crazy." We need to know that other people have had similar experiences. It was a purpose of this study to demonstrate that, to bring Unitarian Universalists "out of the closet" as experiential mystics. For people who want to explore their experiences more fully in a supportive environment, spiritual growth groups and mentor relationships could be more actively cultivated in our churches than they usually are. Our parishioners also need forums for applying insights to living our lives.

Given the frequency of these experiences and the diverse ways people understand them, ministers would be well-advised to compile study materials and resources which can help their parishioners in their efforts to decide whether or not their experiences are relevant or trustworthy, and to help them to evaluate the insights occurring as a result. One way to do this is to be willing to share our own experiences, which many of our clergy are reluctant to do. Among the women clergy in particular are available rich and vivid personal stories of moments which have enriched and changed their lives.

<div align="center">Suggestions for Religious Education</div>

Three primary areas come to mind in which the findings of this study might impact our ministries of religious education. The first is the shaping of an intentional philosophy to inform our process of religious education. The second is the formal path of creating curriculum resources. The third is the fostering of experiential methods for the religious growth of our children, and of the adult community as well.

Philosophy-shaping

The changes now apparent in denominational theology and world view (as reflected in this research) have been in the making for over a decade. Nowhere is this more apparent than in efforts at philosophy-making for religious education. In 1981, as the process to revise the UUA Statement of Principles was just beginning, a committee was formed to look at the future of religious education. Chaired by a clergyman (one of the mid-lifers in the current study), it built a model for shaping religious education programs through developmental stages based upon core Unitarian Universalist principles. Until this point, religious education in the denomination tended to be an eclectic collection of the points of view of other religions. This was the first systematic attempt to claim religious education within the denomination for the clear-cut transmission of our own values and history. Their findings were published in a Report of the Religious Education Futures Committee.[4] This philosophical vision has already impacted the young people who are a part of this study, and deserves to be revisited. A chart depicting the Committee's vision of future religious education is included as Appendix C of this study.

Another contribution to religious education philosophy-making in the 1980s was also written by a mid-life clergyman who was a part of this study. Harold Rosen, for his thesis in philosophy, studied the ideas of Henry Nelson Wieman as they contribute to shaping a vision of religious education, a vision based upon respect for the matrix of reality in which we are embedded and for the creative power of dialog between people of differing experience.[5] As Rosen points out, Wieman's thought is fundamentally empirical. He was committed to the idea that "since human beings are transformed for the good by events in space and time, religious phenomena are best approached empirically – that is , through observation and analysis."[6] That is very much the

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[4] UUA, Report of the Religious Education Futures Committee (Boston: UUA, 1981).
[5] Harold Rosen, Religious Education and Our Ultimate Commitment: An Application of Henry Nelson Wieman's Philosophy of Creative Interchange (Lanham, Md.: Univ. of America Press, 1985).
[6] Rosen, 11.

philosophy which undergirts the present study, and which the insights of this study suggest could be pursued more widely both an educational process in itself.

The process of articulating a creative and inclusive philosophy of religious education continues, with mid-life clergy taking the lead. New curriculum materials and philosophical directions are consonant with the values and experiences of this age-group. The insights of this study could help to focus this process towards the concrete experiences of people of all ages, many cultural backgrounds, and diverse personality types.

Creating Curriculum Resources

Changes in curricula are already happening as a part of the transition in religious perspective which the generational differences in this study reflect. Several curricula exemplifying the changing philosophy of religious education have already been created. Tom Owen-Towle, chair of the Religious Education Futures Committee (and mid-life clergy participant in this study), wrote an adult curriculum built around the new Principles entitled Living the Interdependent Web.[7] Another youth/adult curriculum, called On the Path, addresses diverse forms of spiritual discipline in an experiential way. Several curricula for children have been written which are built around the new Principles.

There are, however, additional foci for curriculum development suggested by the data of this research project. As we include more materials about our own history and identity, we would do well to develop materials which tie the tradition's history more clearly into the larger picture of American society. We are doing better at introducing our children to Unitarian Universalists who have been influential in social change; we might want to see that the children (and adults) become more acquainted with the inward and/or mystical dimensions of the personal faith of our forebears. A curriculum resource exploring the diverse ways people "know what they know" in the area of

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[7] Tom Owen-Towle, Living the Interdependent Web (Boston: UUA, 1987).

religion, values and ultimate concern could be helpful in increasing our understanding of one another and deepening our sense of faith. "Epistemology" has not been something Unitarian Universalists have addressed, at least not openly and inclusively.

The fact that the young among us tend not to give relevance or value to their own experiences is in part due to neglect on the part of their larger religious community -- they have not been provided with a context within which to understand their own experiences. Materials gathered in this study might be a base for developing curriculum resources. Also, more materials providing aesthetic and emotional experience, rather than simply intellectual learning, would help us to honor and to provide context for the more intuitive and sensory dimensions of our faith experiences. The next section addresses several aspects of this issue.

Experiential Learning

The embedded, relational and creative faith matrix which this study helps to document calls us to learn concretely as well as abstractly. An important area in which to foster concrete learning is that of worship. When children (and people of any age) are encouraged to give attention to shaping worship and exploring different meditation practices, they are implicitly and explicitly taught that religious feelings and values are worth attention. They are helped to develop their own spiritual resources, and to explore their spirituality in an embodied form more natural to children than the intellectual and rational abstractions many of our elders use to describe their faith.

At least as important as exploring worship and meditation resources which give embodiment to faith is the process of interpersonal dialogue. The generational differences in this study suggest that we might all learn and grow from cross-generational dialogues in which we share our faith perspectives and experiences. The young among us may well be more open to such sharing than some of the elders, several of whom expressed to me discomfort at even discussing anything remotely "mystical." Children can also be encouraged to share their own experiences, so that as

they grow older they will not believe they must be "closet mystics" like many of their elders. Rosen's book is a good resource for looking at ways we can apply Wieman's theory of "creative interchange" to religious education. I agree with the position of his book that this process is, in fact, the heart of any religious education program which will significantly enhance the potential for creative religious living of its participants.

Implications for Identity: The Unitarian Universalist Movement

The process within our denomination which has both helped to create and been created by the differences in religious perspective between generations reflected in this study is the same process which has birthed the new additions to our Statement of Principles. Any study which helps us to see the reality of the changes taking place within the tradition, and to understand better the shape of those changes, facilitates the continuing evolution of our identity as a religious movement.

Honoring Diversity in a More Inclusive Way

This is a time in the history of Unitarian Universalism when a conscious position has been taken that it is desirable to become more racially and culturally inclusive. Truly honoring diversity, however, is more than a polite dialogue of ideas, or a diversity of skin colors in the sanctuary on Sunday morning. The transition to a more embedded vision of how each individual's religious story is shaped will take our inclusiveness to a deeper level. As Ruether admonished us, we need to include more than diverse ways of thinking and verbalizing; we need to include diverse ways of religious knowing and being and expressing.

As we struggle to be inclusive of people with diverse cultural backgrounds, it will help if we practice more acceptance of the diversity which is already among us. Perhaps this study can help us to see generational differences and gender differences as normal, healthy, and enriching (and, since we are talking incarnational faith, not the same for everyone). It may be that, as we listen more carefully to the stories of others, and perhaps proclaim our own a little more quietly, we will

learn to better honor both inward- and outward- directed faith experience, both reflection and action as important aspects to balance, each for ourselves, as part of our religious journey.

Claiming our History

We are, at our best, a faith of multiple paths in respectful, vital dialogue with one another. The roots of these multiple paths lie in our own history, and we would do well to claim them more forcefully as a part of our religious identity. In support of the importance of this claiming, I would personally advocate adding one more "source" to the Statement of Principles: the history and personal story which has shaped and been shaped by Unitarians and Universals for over four hundred years.

Developing an "Epistemology"

Unitarian Universalists have yet to articulate their faith in systematic terms which match the categories of classical theology. The current study suggests the evolution of a somewhat consensual "cosmology." The new Principles implicitly state attitudes towards all the traditional categories of theology. One category we would do well to address more deliberately is epistemology. We need to articulate and validate diverse ways of knowing as an important religious task. One informant (male young mid-lifer) raised the question, "How do I tell intuition from imagination?" That is an excellent question, and open dialogue between us can help individuals in their personal exploration of such questions. Different people -- different personality types, different generations, different genders to some degree -- learn differently. It is a form of repression to validate linear, rational methods of acquiring knowledge (let alone wisdom), while invalidating others. As long as we do so, we will not be able to include many of the people we are setting out to attract, because they will not be attracted. The truly "universal" religion are those which validate the paths natural to a variety of personalities -- paths of learning, paths of devotion, paths of service, paths of joy.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions

<u>Review of Findings</u>

<u>Primary Research Variables</u>

The primary focus of this project was upon the effect of generation upon patterns of religious practice, experience and understanding. Statistical cross-correlations were run on some items to determine whether variances found were significant. It is clear from statistical analysis that the variable of age and that of gender are highly interactive. For a number of the items analyzed, the cross-generation pattern for women formed a rough "bell curve" -- higher in frequency or agreement to positive statements in the mid-life years, lowest for elders and youth. In some cases, the male pattern was similar, although usually less marked; in other cases there was a more consistent pattern for men across the generations.

Two linear correlations with age were noted: a positive correlation between the importance of reason upon religious convictions, and a negative correlation between frequency of fright responses to the studied experiences (young informants had felt fear significantly more frequently than elders).

Of the six experiences studied, there were marked age-related correlation for the population as a whole in every case but one. Frequency of occurrence of "a sense of oneness/harmony" did not correlate with age for the population as a whole, although it correlated with gender (and with age for women) within the clergy group. The younger mid-life clergywomen report the highest frequency of this experience. "Sense of light/joy" peaks in the youth, while "sense of intuitive certainty" and "sense of 'felt' presence" are consistent until they drop dramatically for elders. "Voice" and "vision" experiences showed the most dramatic age correlations; the mean score on

both for elders, regardless of gender, is 1.0 ("never"). These two showed a lopsided bell curve; the highest mean was for older mid-life women. This and other data in the study raise the question of why there was such a large shift between elders and older mid-lifers, especially for women.

Experiences in the first cluster (oneness/harmony, light/joy, intuitive certainty) were experienced by about 95 percent of the total sample population. In the second cluster, "sense of 'felt' presence" was significantly more common, with about two-thirds of the population reporting this kind of experience at least "rarely," while "voice" and "vision" were significantly less common, at about 45 percent of the population (still remarkably high for rational religious liberals, none the less -- probably higher than many realize).

It may be relevant to note that the first cluster of experiences, which are nearly universal, are continuous with everyday experience, providing perhaps an intensification of that experience. The second cluster, however, can be seen as in some way discontinuous with everyday reality. This may be one of the reasons why the most highly "reasonable" age group in the study does not appear to be open to experiencing them. They involve some letting go of control -- the "passivity" in James' definition of mysticism. This letting go of control seems to have been a common dimension of points in time when the clergywomen interviewed found themselves having such experiences. They were often times of "bottoming out," when they somehow reached out beyond themselves for support. It may be that women are more prone to these types of experiences because many of them are more in the habit of letting go and reaching out for help in the human sphere, so that it is easier for them to extend that reaching for help into the transpersonal arena than it is for many men.

Patterns of interpretation and convictions concerning the relevance, positive value, and trustworthiness of these experiences also vary significantly with both age and (in most cases) gender. On most items, there is less gender variance among the elders than for younger groups. In

several cases (i.e., whether experiences are understood to be irrelevant) the greatest gender differences occur in mid-life, since a bell curve pattern for women is intersected by an almost straight line for men. Males of most ages appear to distinguish more than women between "having positive value" and being "a trustworthy guide."

While frequency of prayer/meditation was only modestly correlated with age or gender, understandings of appropriate purposes for prayer/mediation varied significantly. Especially on the choices "communion with God" and "intercession for others," women's levels of agreement show a bell curve, with high levels of agreement in mid-life, especially for clergywomen on the former. Men, on the other hand, remain consistent or drop, so that the mid-life gender gap is large. The lowest level of agreement with "intercession for others" comes from elder male clergy, while the highest lever of agreement comes from younger mid-life female clergy. The higher relevance of relationship for many women, whether to God or to others, is further supported by a substantially higher mean score for women on the item reporting the frequency with which the described experiences impacted relationships. Evidence of a more relational pattern of religious responses is also provided by some of the differences in God concepts.

As leadership within the denomination appears to be shifting from elder male clergy to younger mid-lifers, more of them than ever before women, the changes in religious perspective which have been surfacing for the past decade and more appear to be accelerating. There is a shift in images of God to a more process-relational model, with which 83 percent of the sample as a whole agree. God is conceived by the great majority as either "a real force which is a part of all things" and/or "the interconnected web." Elder males and youth agree least with the emerging consensus.

On the other hand, only 5 percent chose "a separate reality" or "superior being" as a preferred description of the divine. Unitarian Universalists may have reclaimed God language, but the God

they are reclaiming is an immanent and/or transpersonal, interconnected force. One of the few questions upon which there was a consistent level of agreement across all groups was the suggested interpretation "comes from outside self" for either group of experiences. Few subjects in any group agreed. Several chose to write commentaries about how the divine was "within," or suggest that the Holy "flowed like a river" through everything. This is consistent with the popular process-relational conception of God as "a real power which is a part of all things."

Another aspect of the building consensus is the rather narrow range of mean scores for the items asking about agreement that the two clusters of experiences being explored represent "real interconnectedness." Youth, particularly male youth, were least likely to agree, but all scores were close compared to many other items. Elders were in modest agreement with this interpretation even for the Cluster 2 experiences which very few of them have had.

Secondary Variables

After generation and gender, the variable to which most attention was given was lay or clergy identity. Perhaps the research design would have been more revealing if the two groups had been analyzed completely separately. Age groups were differently impacted by clergy presence, from the youngest two groups and elder women from which they were essentially absent, to the elder mid-life group of which they made up two-thirds for both men and women. Where this factor appeared to be an influence, an attempt was made to separate it out. Items varied greatly as to how much impact the presence of clergy made. This was more often noticeable in the case of women clergy, and, surprisingly, more often in the younger mid-life group where there were fewer of them.

Of all the items in the study which were considered for this variable, level of agreement with the more "traditional" purposes of prayer/meditation showed the most dramatic clergy impact. Another striking difference was in the importance given to intuition as an influence upon conviction. Clergy were significantly higher, regardless of gender, although the younger mid-life

female clergy gave intuition more importance than any other single group. They also chose somewhat different answers to questions concerning the descriptions of the divine/God.

Overall, clergy means for frequency of the experiences being studied were not statistically higher than for the laity. However, fewer report "never" for "'felt' presence," and four times as many clergy as laity report "frequent" occurrences. As with the laity, more female than male clergy report voice and vision experiences.

For the section of the questionnaire asking for understandings of Cluster 2 events, the question was raised whether having had those experiences would significantly influence the way they were evaluated. So "experiencers" were compared with "non-experiencers," to uncover several striking differences in understanding correlated with having personally experienced the phenomena under discussion. Overwhelmingly, "experiencers" understand their experiences as "real interconnectedness" (4.6 on a 5. scale). They also agree (with a 1. spread) that the experiences are of positive value, trustworthy, relevant, and (with somewhat less certainty) that they represent an encounter with God. "Non-experiencers" are significantly less in agreement on these interpretations.

Another variable which was considered for a small set of items was being raised Unitarian Universalist. Those raised in the tradition stood out as preferring to describe the divine as "harmony with nature" more than the sample population at large (49% to 36%). Clergy raised Unitarian Universalist were consistent with this preference, but only 10 percent of the clergy not raised within the tradition agreed. It would appear that some of the impetus for an evolving natural/ mystical/ relational theology is coming from within the tradition, rather than that it is attracting large numbers of people who are the source of the change.

One of the most puzzling findings concerning the influence of Unitarian Universalist roots was that, where the female clergy raised in the tradition agreed even more strongly than their peers that

a purpose of prayer was "communion with God" (4.8 on a 5. scale), male clergy raised within the tradition disagreed (at 2.3) considerably more than other male clergy (at 3.0). Is it possible males and females raised Unitarian Universalist incorporate this faith differently? However, each of these sub-samples included only about 10 subjects, so a much broader sample would be required to validate this observation.

<u>Correlations between Practice, Beliefs, Epistemology and Experience</u>

A variety of correlations run between items which seemed logically related. One major cluster of correlations was uncovered. Those who consider intuition highly influential in the formation of their convictions tend to pray more frequently, to see "communion with God" as a purpose for prayer, to report higher frequency of occurrence for all six studied experiences, and to understand those experiences as relevant, trustworthy, having positive value, representing "real interconnectedness" and being an "encounter with God." In contrast, reason as highly important to the formation of one's convictions only correlated modestly with one other item: agreement that Cluster 2 experiences ("presence," "voice," "vision") were "illusion." Those who gave reason highest place among the influences upon their beliefs were least likely to pray/meditate frequently, although the pattern was not strong enough for a negative correlation.

<p align="center"><u>Application of Contextual Materials to Findings</u></p>

<u>Generational Theory</u>

A generational model proposed by Strauss and Howe in their recent book, <u>Generations</u> was offered as one way to understand some of the generational differences uncovered by the original research portion of this project. Age-groupings for this study approximated the generational divisions proposed by these sociologists. With the exception of the youngest age group, Unitarian Universalists were found to exemplify certain aspects of generational characteristics observed in the culture at large.

Where the eldest generation nationwide is described as left-brain dominant, action-oriented and resistant to despair, elder Unitarian Universalists tend to exhibit these qualities as much, if not more, than the culture at large. They differ, however, in demonstrating a higher level of individualism than is characteristic of their generation at large. The older mid-life group, Strauss and Howe's "Silent" generation, have certainly within Unitarian Universalism gone through the collective mid-life crisis these authors describe as common for their generation. Our religious communities still bear the scars of this process of breaking free of sexual norms and relationship commitments. They have also reaped the benefits of feminist values, interest in causes such as civil rights, and growing focus upon participation and process in group life.

The younger mid-lifers (the "Boom" generation) show perhaps the strongest cultural influence. During the 1960s, this generation of Unitarian Universalists swung farther with the culture-wide "consciousness revolution" than did most groups of young people. Their idealism is still apparent as they move into leadership roles within the denomination (like the nation, the UUA has its first "Boom" president without ever electing one from the Silent generation). Young adults, however, appear to conform less to the culture-wide patterns, perhaps because those who choose church affiliation at that age are self-selected. They appear, as a whole, less cynical and isolated from their elders than is reported for the society at large.

Impact of the Tradition's History

Although the dominant strand of history within Unitarian Universalism emphasizes the importance of rationalism, there have always been voices, especially within Universalism, which spoke out for a more holistic, emotional, embedded and embodied faith. We need to examine our own faith assumptions with the understanding that they do not in any sense represent "pure" or "abstract" truth. Rather, they are the end result of social influences, personality preferences, and even accidents of history. Unitarianism's rationalism, for example, was a response to the excesses

of the Great Awakening, and expressed a classist conviction associated with upper class New England society that emotionalism in religion was uncouth. We are challenged to an ongoing dialogue with our own past.

A look at selected spokespersons for the more recent past shows us that some of the key changes which are surfacing within our faith tradition have truly evolved from within, and that their roots go deep. This century has led us to reach for more inclusive paradigms. Worship materials, and more recently both the new Principles statement and a new hymnal, have given body to theological positions with which relatively few lay people are familiar in more scholarly format. In particular, the liturgical materials of Kenneth Patton have had a dramatic impact upon the imaging of faith. With the new hymnal and Marilyn Sewell's book, more of that imaging comes from the minds and spirits of women.

Changing Identity

New additions in the 1985 revision of Unitarian Universalist Statement of Principles both reflect and have accelerated the tradition's changing identity. One striking example lifted up by this research project is the popularity of "the interconnected web" as a metaphor for the divine. The phrase was scarcely known nine years ago, yet it topped all other conceptions of God in this study: 63 percent for the sample population at large, and 70 percent for those raised Unitarian Universalist. In addition to the seventh Principle, which refers to the "interconnected web of all existence," the third Principle promotes "spiritual growth " and the first "source" statement acknowledges "direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder . . . which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life."

The shape of Unitarian Universalist identity has been changed, and will continue to change, as a result of the ten-fold increase in the past twenty years of the percentage of persons ordained to the clergy who are women. As this study shows, women clergy tend to be more open to the

experiences studied, and to positive interpretations of those experiences, as well as a sense of prayer relationship with God. For the first time, younger mid-life clergywomen are speaking out as creative theologians, and one is President of a Unitarian Universalist seminary. Nor is influence for change limited to female clergy. Three of the mid-life male clergy who participated in this study are also acknowledged for their ground-breaking theological and philosophical writings. All three were among those who rated intuition as more important to the formation of their convictions than reason.

Overall, the data from this study support the thesis with which this project began. Due to the small size of the sample population (especially when broken up into ten sub-groups), conclusions can only be tentative. However, the contextual information provided reinforces and helps to explain the observed tendencies towards a generational shift in Unitarian Universalist theology (in particular, cosmology and epistemology) and therefore in identity.

Suggestions for Further Research

Considerable material was covered in this project. Suggestions for further research can go in a number of directions.

Additional Work with Survey Instrument

The findings of any limited population survey with a questionnaire become more conclusive if further study with the same instrument duplicates the results and/or allows a larger sample population upon which to base results. This instrument could be used as it stands in order to allow maximum cross-comparisons between samples. Or it could be carefully revised and focused in such a way that comparisons for the most relevant data were still possible. Other sample populations could broaden the base for data about laity and clergy in the UUA. It would also be possible to choose contrasting populations, such as Unitarians outside of the United States, or from faith traditions other than Unitarian Universalism. Groups are defined both by what is

characteristic of their members, and those areas in which their members contrast with members of other groups.

Findings from this questionnaire study could also be profitably cross-correlated with a personality measure such as the Myers-Briggs. This could provide insight into the contributions of personality type to frequency and understanding of the types of experiences studied.

Generational Theory

There was not space in this study to do more than touch upon sociological studies of generational trends. A more in-depth look at how these trends in the larger society have impacted the Unitarian Universalist tradition, both historically and contemporaneously, could be interesting.

Tools for Understanding

Given that this study and other evidence document a significant frequency of experiences which are often self-described as "mystical" by informants, a possible follow-up project would be to assemble in one place information about the different ways such experiences have been, and are, understood. This could include an exploration of the history of the experiential side of religion, both within the Unitarian Universalist tradition and in the wider community. It might include stories and arts from mystical traditions such as the Hasidic and the Sufi. Theories from sociology, psychotherapy, developmental psychology and the psychology of religion could be touched upon briefly. Shifts in modern paradigms for science, particularly physics, and in family systems understandings could be touched upon as relating to a larger paradigm shift about the nature of the cosmos – towards a more relational and less atomistic model.

Story-listening, Story-telling

The suggestions above for follow-up studies require a research focus and a block of time to pursue it. My last suggestion for follow-up, however, is one that can be implemented by anyone. The creative interchange which promotes spiritual growth thrives upon listening to one anothers'

stories, empathically and with open minds. Cross-generation and cross-gender dialogues can be especially fruitful, as can cross-cultural sharing. Being a listener, a receiver-of-stories, is an important part of the ministry. This is a spiritual discipline, in that it involves opening oneself to other people's differing realities with the real possibility that they might change our own. The research for this project has been a form of listening for the diverse shapes of interior religious experience within a religious tradition.

One further study project I am considering is collecting stories from other women in the Unitarian Universalist clergy about their spiritual struggles, especially the struggles many of them overcame in the very act of claiming their vocation. My brief interviews for the current study provided a glimpse of depth and richness, of life-changing experiences, of on-going relationship with an in-dwelling and transpersonal force which has upheld them in times of grief, discouragement and despair.

In closing, then, I encourage each of us to listen to one another's real life experiences. Each story is individual, no matter how many strands of common story it contains. We need to tell and receive them sensitive to the mystery of each life in concrete. In such telling and hearing, we deepen our own stories, perceive them as richer and more complicated than we thought, and have the opportunity to reflect upon them from many points of view. Sometimes we actually learn something from another's story which is of practical use in our own lives. But since we are all unique, what we are most likely to learn is less concrete: appreciation for the diversity and resilience of the human spirit, the persistence of hope, the value of a commitment to struggling with truth in the various ways it addresses each of us, and the realization that a deeper life may await those who have the courage to be open to the creative spirit moving in unexpected ways. If we are liberal, rational, independent Unitarian Universalists, we may be surprised to learn how many of

our peers have been deeply comforted and transformed by a force larger than themselves moving in their lives.

APPENDIX A

Additional Graphs of Significant Findings

GRAPH A.1

FREQUENCY OF PRAYER/MEDITATION

| | TOTAL WOMEN | | TOTAL MEN |
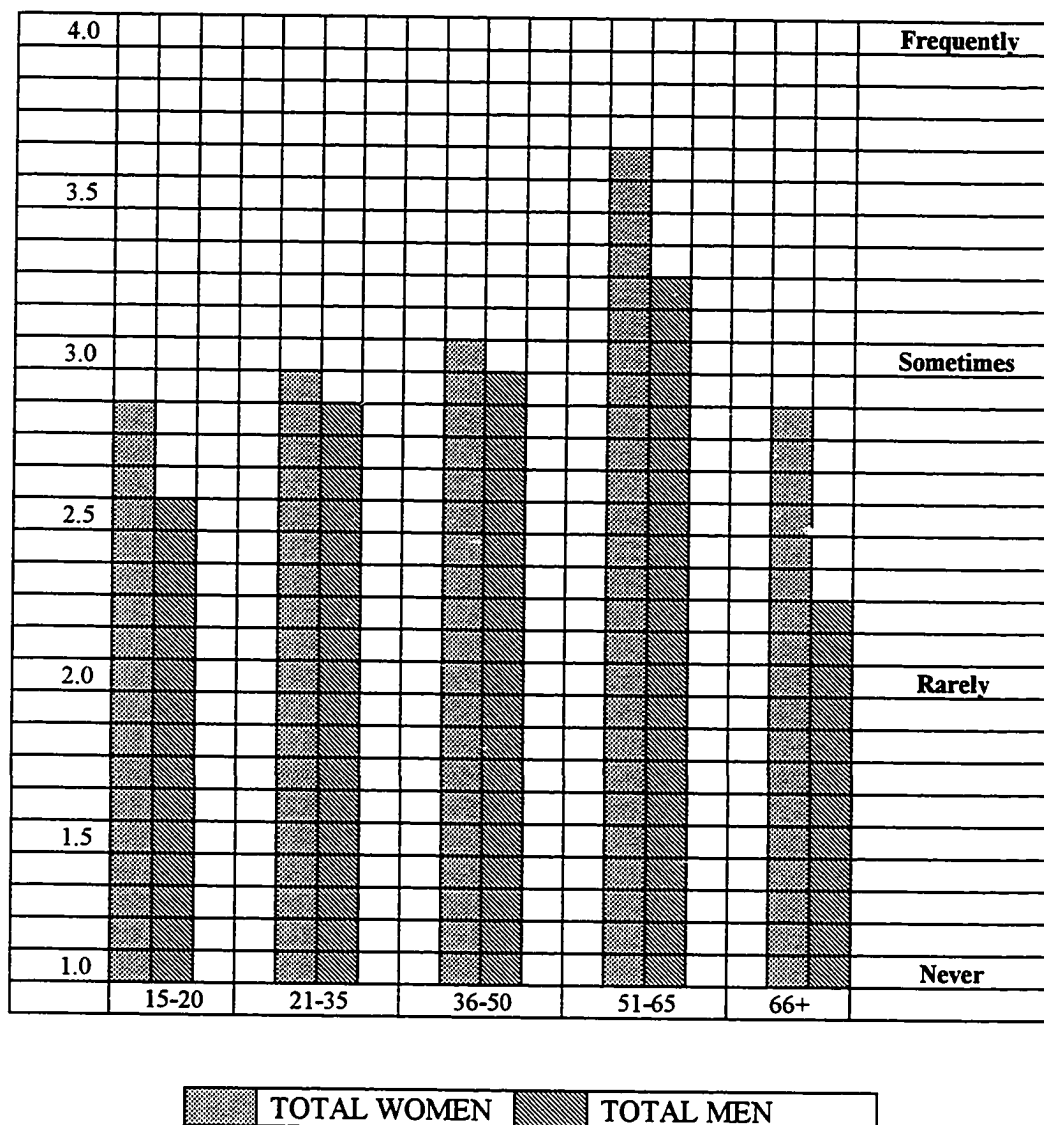
GRAPH A.2

FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCE: SENSE OF "INTUITIVE CERTAINTY"
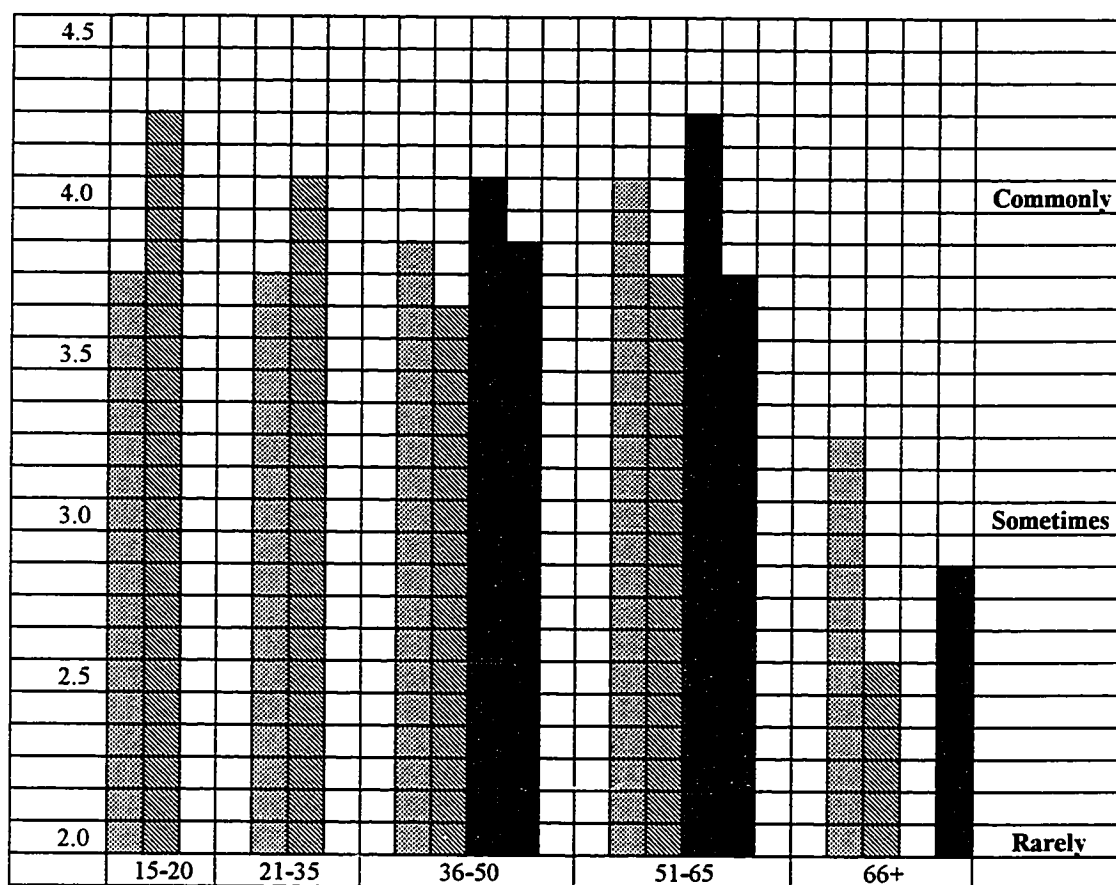
	TOTAL WOMEN		CLERGY WOMEN
	TOTAL MEN		CLERGY MEN

GRAPH A.3

FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCE: SENSE OF "ONENESS/HARMONY"

	TOTAL WOMEN		CLERGY WOMEN
	TOTAL MEN		CLERGY MEN
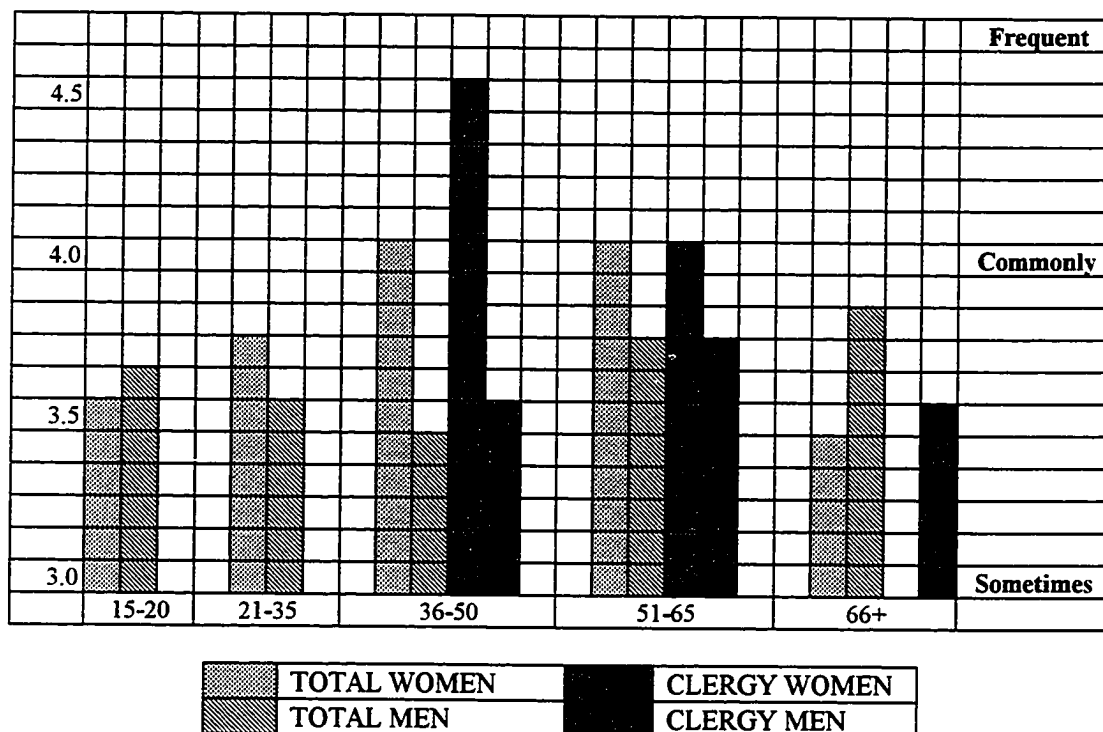
GRAPH A:4

FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCE: "SENSE OF 'FELT' PRESENCE"
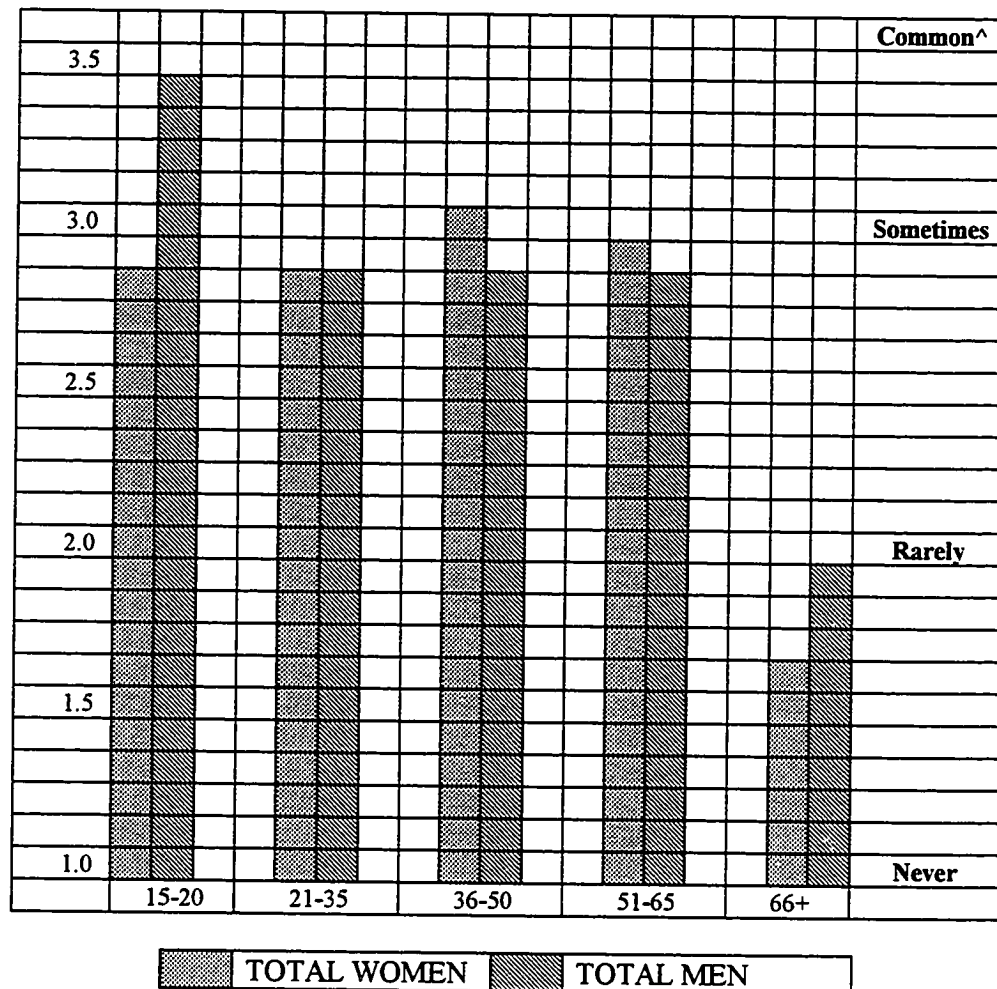
GRAPH A.5

FREQUENCY OF EXPERIENCE: A "VISION"
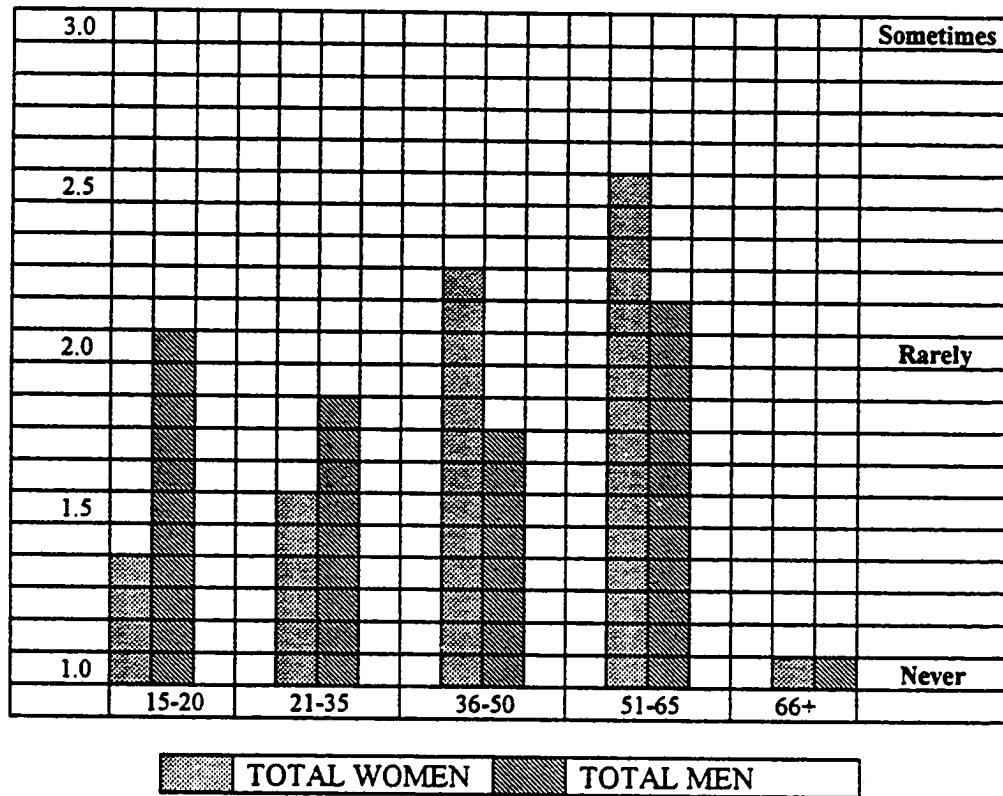
GRAPH A.6

CLUSTER 1 EXPERIENCES AS "COMFORTING"

| | 15-20 | 21-35 | 36-50 | 51-65 | 65+ | |

Labels: 4.5, 4.0 Commonly, 3.5, 3.0 Sometimes, 2.5, 2.0 Rarely

TOTAL WOMEN   TOTAL MEN
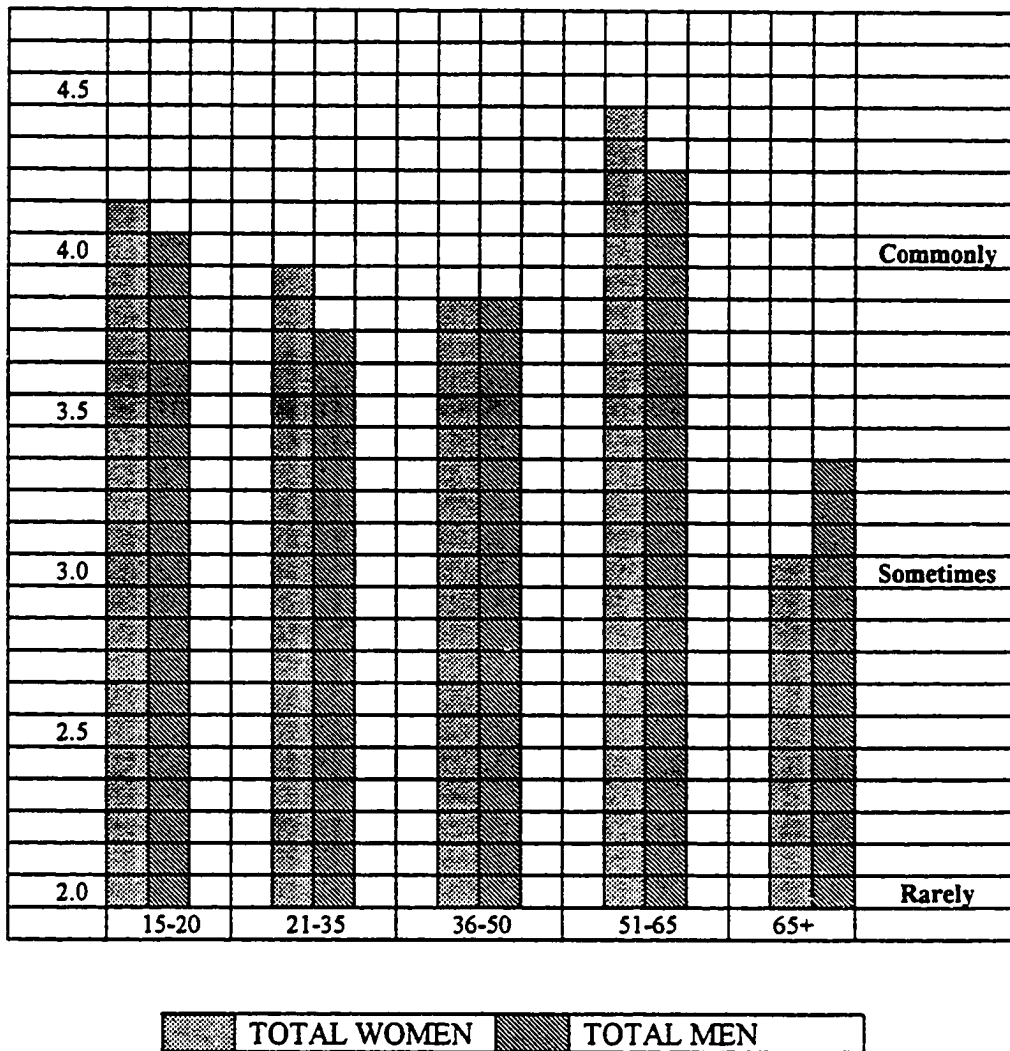
GRAPH A.7

CLUSTER 2 EXPERIENCES AS "ENCOUNTERING GOD"
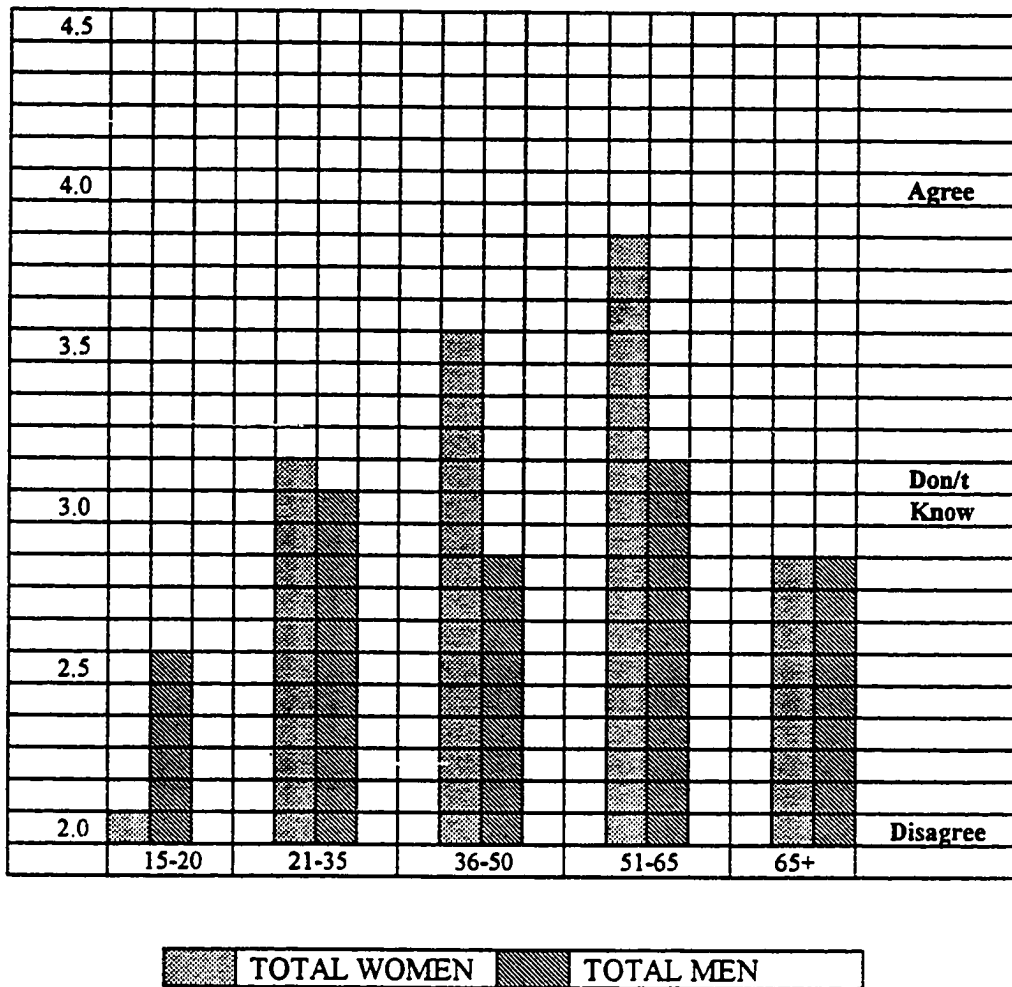
GRAPH A.8

CLUSTER 1 EXPERIENCES AS "IRRELEVANT"
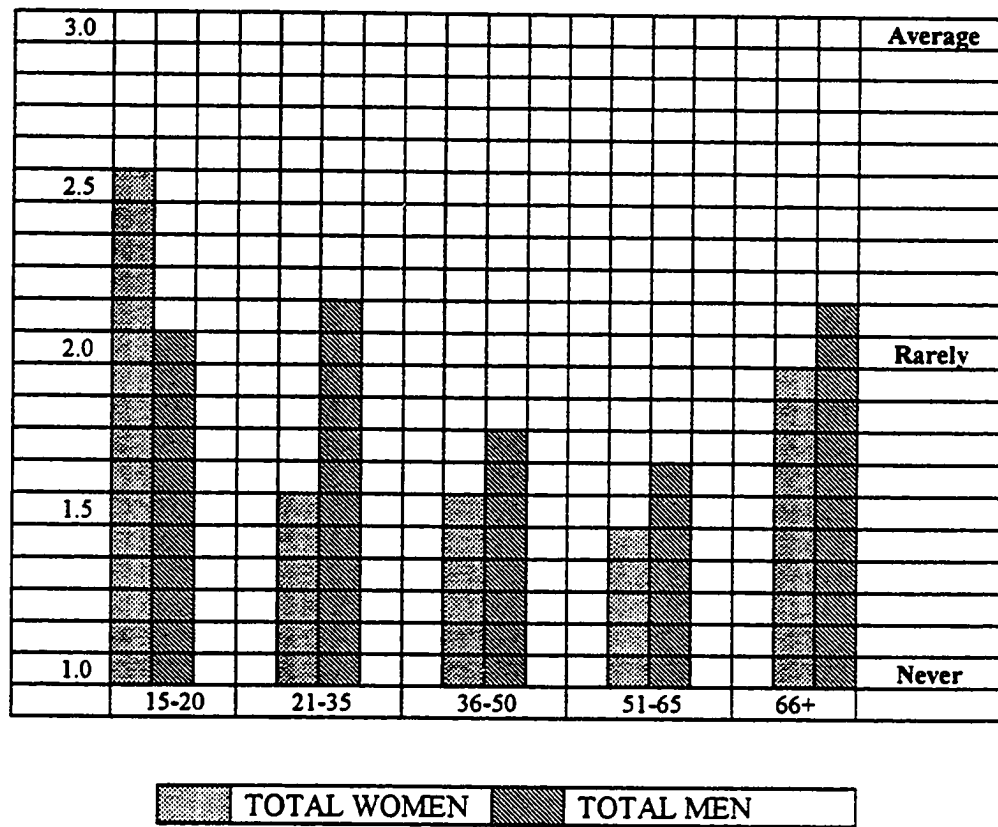
GRAPH A.9

CLUSTER 1 EXPERIENCES AS "TRUSTWORTHY GUIDE"
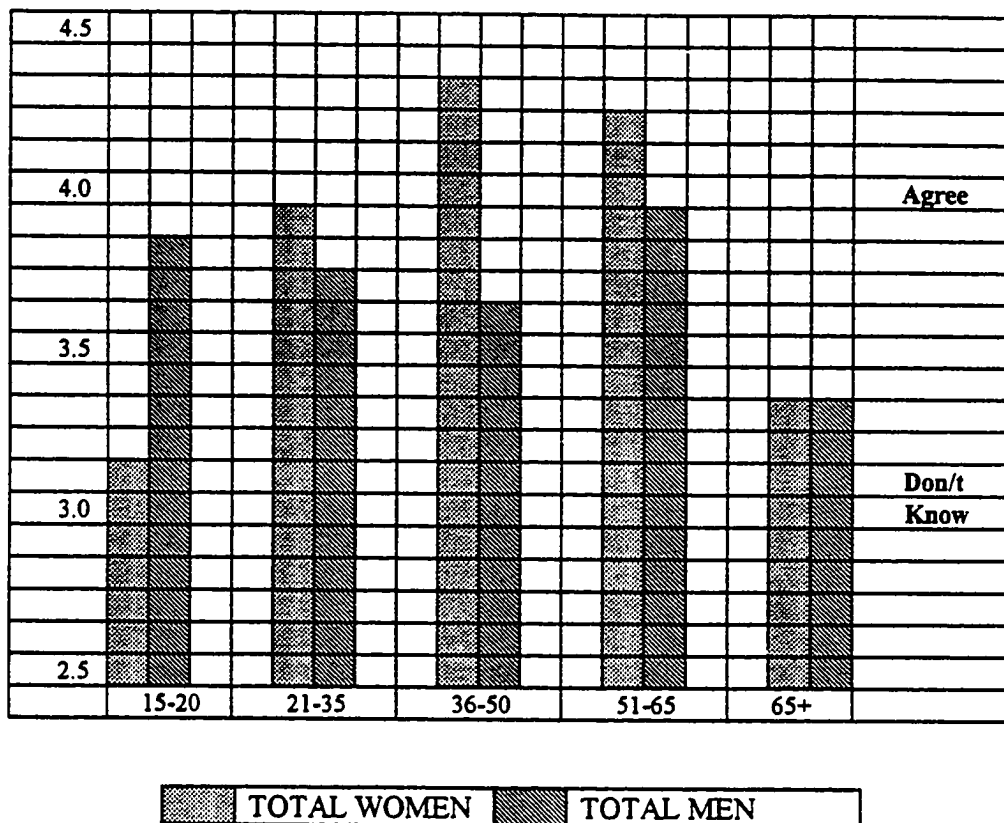
GRAPH A.10

CLUSTER 2 EXPERIENCES AS HAVING "POSITIVE VALUE"
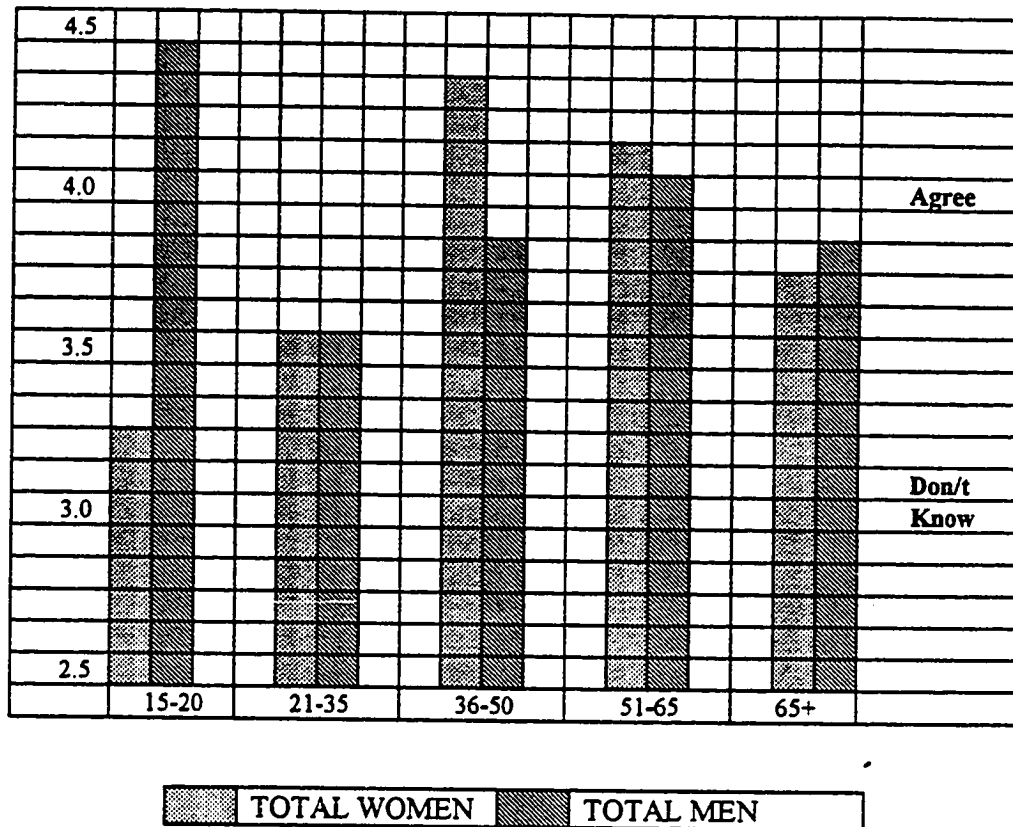
APPENDIX B

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS

This questionnaire is part of a study of the relationship between subjective religious experience and beliefs among Unitarian Universalists.   Your willingness to share your own beliefs and experiences to further this research is much appreciated.

A small sample of respondents will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview to describe their experiences more fully.

NAME:_____CONGREGATION _____

AGE: ___15-20; ___21-25; ___26-35; ___36-50; ___51-65; ___65+

CHILDHOOD CHURCH AFFILIATION: ___UU; ___Conserv. Protestant;

___Mainline/Liberal Protestant; ___Catholic; ___Jewish; ___None;

Other: _____   GENDER: ___F ___M   YEARS UU:_____

I. RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

CHURCH ATTENDANCE:
As a child: ___Never; ___Occasionally; ___1-2x/mo.; ___3x/mo.+
Now: ___   ___   ___   ___

*I meditate or pray: (check one)
____Often; ____Occasionally; ____Seldom; ____Never

*The following describe some purposes or functions that meditation or prayer might fulfill. Indicate your agreement with each by circling the appropriate number on each line.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Communion with God	1	2	3	4	5
Petition (for self)	1	2	3	4	5
Intercession (for others)	1	2	3	4	5
Self affirmation	1	2	3	4	5
Communion with inner self	1	2	3	4	5
**Increases serenity/courage	1	2	3	4	5
**Clarifies direction	1	2	3	4	5
Do not find the term useful	1	2	3	4	5

I have another form of religious practice (describe):_____

II. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS
Which of the following have influenced your religious convictions?

Influence:	Great >>>>>>>>>>Little/none				
Personal experience	1	2	3	4	5
Childhood teachings	1	2	3	4	5
Reading and study	1	2	3	4	5
Reason	1	2	3	4	5
Intuition	1	2	3	4	5
Experiences of people I respect.	1	2	3	4	5
Ideas of people I respect.	1	2	3	4	5

*Which one of the following statements comes <u>closest</u> to expressing your beliefs about God?

____ "God" is a supernatural being revealed in human experience and history.

____ "God" is the ground of all being, real but not adequately describable.

____ "God" may appropriately be used as a name for some natural process within the universe, such as love or creative evolution.

____ "God" is an irrelevant concept, and the central focus of religion should be on human knowledge and values.

____ "God" is a concept that is harmful to a worthwhile religion.

*The way I would describe the divine for myself is:

____	Don't know/Uncertain	____	Unknowable Power
____	Higest Potential	____	Creative Force
____	Harmony with Nature	____	Superior Being
____	Meaningless	____	Harmful Concept

I conceive God as (check all that apply):

____ A separate, concrete reality

____ An real power which is a part of all things

____ A "being" with whom one can experience relationship

____ The "interconnected web."

____ A human creation which functions to reinforce a society's ideals.

____ A human creation which functions to preserve the existing power structure.

____ A hypothetical ideal

____ "The opiate of the masses"

*I believe in some form of life after death: (check one)

____ Yes; ____No; ____ Not Sure

I believe that my life has some purpose beyond that which I create.

____Yes; ____No: ____Not Sure

III. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

A. Have you experienced the following?

Frequency: Commonly>>>>>>>>>Rarely/Never

A sense of oneness/harmony	1	2	3	4	5
Sudden strong feelings of light/joy	1	2	3	4	5
Sense of intuitive certainty	1	2	3	4	5

If you have had any of the above experiences, did they:
Strengthen or change your convictions regarding:

Yourself?	1	2	3	4	5
Your directions in life?	1	2	3	4	5
The divine/God?	1	2	3	4	5
An afterlife?	1	2	3	4	5
A human "soul" or "spirit?"	1	2	3	4	5

Influence your decision-making:

on risk-taking?	1	2	3	4	5
on relationships?	1	2	3	4	5
on religious affiliation?	1	2	3	4	5
on values?	1	2	3	4	5
on service to the larger world?	1	2	3	4	5

Have such experiences made you feel:

Comforted?	1	2	3	4	5
Frightened?	1	2	3	4	5
More loving/compassionate?	1	2	3	4	5
More detached?	1	2	3	4	5

Whether or not you have had such experiences, do you understand them as:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Physiological "accident"	1	2	3	4	5

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Protective illusion	1	2	3	4	5
Message from Unconscious	1	2	3	4	5
Real interconnectedness	1	2	3	4	5
Projected expectation	1	2	3	4	5
Encountering "God."	1	2	3	4	5
Originating outside self	1	2	3	4	5
Having positive value	1	2	3	4	5
Trustworthy guide	1	2	3	4	5
Containing truth	1	2	3	4	5
Irrelevant	1	2	3	4	5
Harmful	1	2	3	4	5
Shaped by beliefs	1	2	3	4	5

B. Have you experienced the following?

Frequency: Commonly>>>>>>>>>Rarely/Never

A sense of "felt" presence?	1	2	3	4	5
A "voice"?	1	2	3	4	5
A vision?	1	2	3	4	5

If you have had voice, vision or presence experiences, did they:

Frequency: Commonly>>>>>>>>>Rarely/Never

Strengthen or change your convictions regarding:

yourself?	1	2	3	4	5
Your directions in life?	1	2	3	4	5
the divine/God	1	2	3	4	5
in the demonic?	1	2	3	4	5
in Jesus or other "guide"?	1	2	3	4	5
in an afterlife?	1	2	3	4	5
in a human "soul" or "spirit?"	1	2	3	4	5

Influence your decision-making:

on risk-taking?	1	2	3	4	5
on relationships?	1	2	3	4	5
on religious affiliation?	1	2	3	4	5
on values?	1	2	3	4	5
on service to the larger world?	1	2	3	4	5

Have such experiences made you feel:

Comforted?	1	2	3	4	5
Frightened?	1	2	3	4	5
More loving/compassionate?	1	2	3	4	5
More detached?	1	2	3	4	5

Whether or not you have had such experiences, do you understand voice, vision or presence experiences as:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Physiological "accident"	1	2	3	4	5
Protective illusion	1	2	3	4	5
Message from Unconscious	1	2	3	4	5
Real interconnectedness	1	2	3	4	5
Projected expectation	1	2	3	4	5
Encountering "God."	1	2	3	4	5
Originating outside self	1	2	3	4	5
Having positive value	1	2	3	4	5
Trustworthy guide	1	2	3	4	5
Containing truth	1	2	3	4	5
Irrelevant	1	2	3	4	5
Harmful	1	2	3	4	5
Shaped by beliefs	1	2	3	4	5

****
Please use the back for any relevant comments or explanations

FUTURES COMMITTEE

THE CURRICULUM MODEL

RESOURCES:

- Contemporary and Historical Events Forces
- Secular Literature
- Arts
- Other Religions/Cultures
- Judeo-Christian Heritage
- Unitarian Universalist Heritage

PRINCIPLES:

- Affirm the free and disciplined search for truth
- Affirm equality & dignity of each human person
- Affirm the use of democratic process, mutual respect in human relationships
- Affirm commitment to implement vision of world community founded on love, justice, peace.
- Affirm reality beyond individual creation or control variously called God; Ultimate Reality, the Holy, Life Force or the Transcendent
- Affirm interdependence with universe, and responsibility to cherish and be caring; steward of the earth
- Affirm importance of religious community and responsibility for its nurturance.

DEVELOPMENTAL LEVELS

ps pr int jr. hi sr. hi ADULT

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